THE Hudson REVIEW

BRIGID BROPHY:
Detective Fiction: A Modern Myth of Violence?

HERBERT GOLD:
A Haitian Gentleman—a story

JOHN SIMON:
The Albeejonesian Heresies and Others

DONALD RICHIE:
Notes on the Noh

BENJAMIN DE MOTT
Dirty Words?

Poems by ANNE SEXTON, MAY SWENSON, W. D. SNODGRASS.

Articles and Reviews by MARVIN MUDRICK, HAYDEN CARRUTH, VERNON YOUNG, ROGER SALE, B. H. HAGGIN, GERALD WEALES, HOWARD GREEN, HENRY GELDZAHLER, GEORGE P. ELLIOTT.

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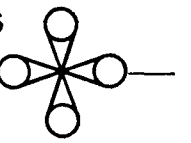

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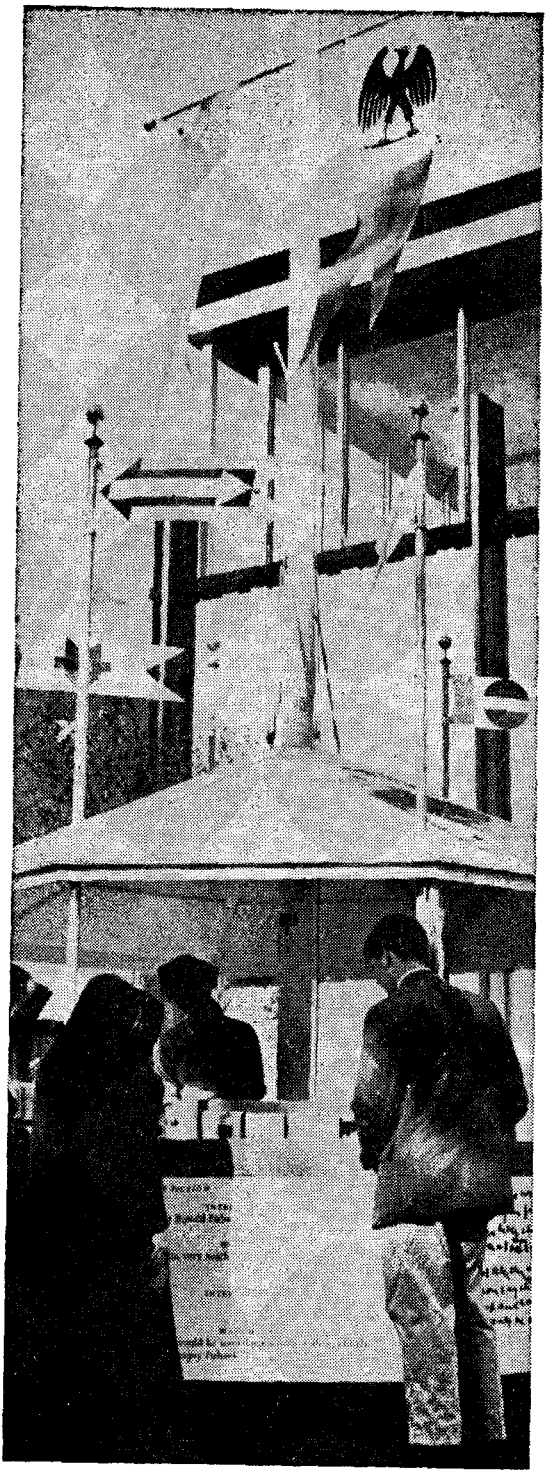

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Notes on Contributors

Novelist (latest: *The Snow Ball* and *The Finishing Touch,* published in one volume by World) and author of nonfiction (latest: *Mozart the Dramatist,* Harcourt, Brace), BRIGID BROPHY was born in London 35 years ago and now lives there with her husband, Michael Levey, art historian and Assistant Keeper at the National Gallery, and their 8-year-old daughter.

"An Eye on the Weather," a new story by BENJAMIN DE MOTT, will appear in an early issue of this Review.

ANNE SEXTON is the author of *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* and *All My Pretty Ones.*

HERBERT GOLD, the well-known novelist and story writer, lives in San Francisco.

MAY SWENSON's collection, *To Mix With Time, New & Selected Poems,* recently published by Scribner's, has gone into a second printing in both cloth and paper covers.

DONALD RICHIE is co-author of *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (Charles E. Tuttle Co., Rutland, Vermont). He is now living in Tokyo and writing a book on Kurosawa.

HENRY GELDZAHLER, Associate Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum, is the author of *American Painting in the 20th Century,* to be published this spring by the New York Graphic Society. This is his first appearance in *The Hudson Review.*

In this issue MARVIN MUDRICK celebrates his twelfth anniversary as a contributor to *The Hudson Review* with his twenty-sixth contribution.

Two new books by HAYDEN CARRUTH have recently been published by Macmillan: *After the Stranger: Imaginary Dialogues with Camus* and *Nothing for Tigers (Poems 1959-1964).*

GERALD WEALES' latest book is *A Play and Its Parts* (Basic Books), which he describes as a "primer" for high school students.

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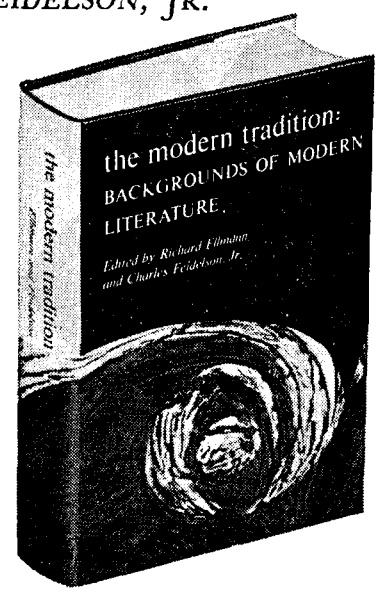
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BRIGID BROPHY

Detective Fiction: A Modern Myth of Violence?

1

THE QUESTION MARK IS CASTING DOUBT ON THE VIOLENCE, not the modernity or the myth—both of which are, indeed, exactly to the point.

Admittedly it is only in a longish historical view that one can call something modern which is 122 years old. But in that longish view, 122 is just about the age of modernity itself—of our present, industrialised phase of civilisation. From what went before we are cut off socially by the industrial and intellectually by the French Revolution. People before that demarcation are unaccountable creatures in fancy dress; after it, they are ourselves, modern man, in—if they are men in the sexual sense as well—trousers. There are sound reasons why detective fiction and modernity are roughly coeval. Of its nature, the detective story could not have been invented in the (to us) age of fancy dress. The detective quintessentially wears trousers.

In a longer view still, the contrast with "modern" is "ancient"—A.D. is opposed to B.C.; and in this view the detective story has a fairly precise claim to be one of the few equivalents the modern world can put forward to the myths of the ancient. We incline to toss off the word "myth" inexactly: we call Marilyn Monroe a myth (when we really mean a goddess—a myth being, by etymology, a story and not simply a personality, however touching); novels should be myths, according to some of their theorists (who seem to mean, if anything, that novels should make manifest material from the unconscious). The detective story itself is not a myth in the very strictest sense of an anonymous, undated fiction passing itself off as truth. But it does share one prominent characteristic of myths: it runs to type. In the ancient world, which set so much less store than we do by novelty and originality, many poems or plays, by several authors, might repeat the story of a single myth; and, quite over and above that, the single mythical

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story itself was often a good deal less singular than it seemed. Very many—perhaps most—of the Greek myths can be divided into groups, the myths in each group being in fact variations on a single skeleton narrative. The countless stories we generically call "the detective story" resemble a group of myths, inasmuch as there is really only one skeleton detective story, on which detective writers invent variations consciously (which probably separates them from the anonymous and no doubt multiple authors of myths) and more or less ingeniously.

2

In the ancient world itself, Ovid pointed out by implication that myths tend to run to type when he compiled his *Metamorphoses*. The entire collection has a single underlying story: some*one* is transformed into some*thing*. Within this, there are sub-groups, according to why the transformation takes place—as a reward, to save a virgin from a fate worse than metamorphosis, and so forth; and every now and then one of the myths makes a conspicuous, though wholly superficial, bid for independence by tying itself to, and claiming to account for, the genesis of a particular species of bush or the invention of a particular musical instrument. In the same way, a single skeleton lies inside several of the stories of the Greek heroes. A hero was often tied very conspicuously to local patriotism, being claimed for the royal dynasty or as the founding father of one of those Greek city-states which were so notoriously unwilling to surrender their sovereign independence. The granular individualism of Greek politics is reflected in the unwillingness of Greek mythology to amalgamate its heroes into a single national hero. Had mythology cared to do it, the job would not have been hard, because the heroes, for all their seeming individualism, are remarkably unoriginal. Quantities of them conform to a type of *the* hero. He is usually of royal or divine parentage, and at his birth someone prophesies for him a future so disturbing to his father or, which may be the same thing, the ruler that it is decided to kill him in infancy. But by one mechanism or another he escapes death—and also the city of his birth. He is brought up by strangers in a foreign land. Sometimes his foster-parents disclose his true identity to him when he comes of age (or they are about to die); sometimes he has to wait until he is identified by someone

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in his native city when he returns there. Return there, whether by chance or in order to claim his inheritance, he always does; and he always finds the city in urgent need of a hero. Some innocent party, perhaps the king's daughter, perhaps the whole population, is under threat from some monstrous tyranny. The hero arrives just in time to destroy the dragon—or whatever form the monster takes—by a display of heroic courage or magic or both. He may perform other, incidental wonders and shew forth the signs of his true identity; he is acclaimed as a saviour; if he is the king's son he is publicly acknowledged, and if he is not he usually becomes the king's son-in-law. Eventually, whether by inheritance, marriage or being co-opted by the grateful population, he becomes king.

This story was capable not only of local variation but of crossing a major frontier and adapting itself to the moeurs of a different civilisation. The Greek custom of exposing unwanted children, which gave the baby hero in Greek versions of the myth so many opportunities to be saved by a tender-hearted nurse or fortuitously found by a humane shepherd, was not practised in Palestine, where (although the shepherds remain, rather gratuitously, in the story) King Herod has to resort to the wholesale slaughter of the innocents. That, it may be, is a rather clumsy and extravagant variation, but in other items of the myth transplantation brings a gain in gravity and in the rarity of the hero's standing. In Greek mythology, with its multiplicity of lecherous gods, the hero who is the son of a god and a mortal woman was bound to be rather common. Shifted into the sphere of influence of the jealously monotheistic and on other occasions sexless Jewish god, the hero's claim became much more impressive—so much so, indeed, that it was blasphemous; and that enabled it to fit neatly in, from the point of view of the mechanics of the plot, with the important and emotionally very significant change the Christian myth makes in the ending of the story.

For a modern audience, the Greek hero is in danger of losing our sympathy. In the contest between the hero (or his Christian successor, St George) and the dragon, we are apt to take sides with the dragon. The danger became plain indeed when an ancient, though not Greek, hero was music-dramatised by Wagner. Siegfried (one of the heroes, incidentally, who is always seeking the truth about his parentage) behaves like the nastiest sort of boy

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bully when he wantonly wakens, provokes and kills Fafner. Wagner does, just, make us swallow the situation—he seduces us by the beauty of the horn calls with which Siegfried summons the sleeping dragon; but Wagner the impresario was evidently not quite confident that Wagner the artist had succeeded, since he took monstrously extravagant—and therefore inartistic—pains to build up the poor dragon by stage-carpentry into something that should pass for an opponent of Siegfried's own calibre.

From the danger of creating a sadistic hero the Christian myth escaped by the nearest masochistic emergency exit. The new version of the myth was calculated to appeal to a modern audience and in fact, in making its tremendously wide appeal, it transformed the ancient world into the modern. In the Christian version, the population does not recognise the distinguishing marks which identify the hero as the royally and divinely descended person of whom so much has been prophesied; instead, it denies him and makes his claim to be his father's son the occasion for accusing him of blasphemy. He is executed and triumphs only after death, when he enters into his inheritance of a kingdom that is not of this world. In this world his part is that of innocent victim, offering himself in place of the people—who in this version are not innocent but guilty of sins which culminate in their denial of the hero.

This convenient exit proved in the end ill-advised. It had the effect of amalgamating the hero's father with the tyrant who threatens the people, creating a monster god capable of accepting his son's self-sacrifice in lieu of the sinful population, at the same time requiring the population to do endless penance for their sins or else forgo the benefits the son has bought for them. The masochistic trap door had led to a god whose sadistic tyranny was redoubled because it was also sanctimonious. This issue was not, however, foreseen when the new version of the myth appeared. It quickly made enough emotional headway in the Greco-Roman world for its adherents to acquire some political power; and since, of all the sects in that world (with the exception of the Jews, who did not, however, proselytize), the Christian was the only one to be absolutely non-tolerating of all the others, the Christians quickly used their political power to shut down the whole of pagan mythology by force of law.

The monster god who then clamped his tyranny over Christen-

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dom naturally monopolised Christendom's faculty for inventing and launching myths. That faculty was constrained to flow almost exclusively into the lives of the saints (which often followed a minor heroic pattern) and into the acts of magic performed by their relics, acts which shewed an even greater tendency than the feats of the heroes to reduplicate a type. The myth-making capacity revived a little before it was overtaken and virtually extinguished by a written culture, but many of Christendom's myths are Christian-tinted. The tint is not always so blatant as it is in witchcraft, whose mythology is simply the Christian one written, bravely but unimaginatively, back to front, but it is usually perceptible. A light and charming Christian varnish washes the whole concept of chivalry, whose ladies do not escape a certain conflation with the madonna and whose knights and troubadours are not wholly distinct from crusaders, while King Arthur suffers the quests of his knights errant to be merged with a quest for the Holy Grail. Perhaps the first figure to revive anything of the heroic pattern in a wholly secular tone is Robin Hood, who seldom enters a church except to rescue the sweetheart of one of his merry men when she is being sacrificed as an innocent victim to a monstrous man she does not love.

3

Compared with the Greek or even the medieval world, ours is short of myths. That does not, of course, mean that our imaginative life has been impoverished. On the contrary. But it is now carried on chiefly through stories which bear a date, an authorship and the open announcement that they are fictions. Great changes have taken place in our attitude to both authorship and fiction—ultimately as the result, no doubt, of the change from an oral to a written culture. Long after Greek culture became literate it remained predominantly, in the very nature of its traditions and conventions, oral—indeed, it remained specifically rhetorical. It did so, probably, because it could. The city-state had a small enough population for the whole electorate to be addressed by an orator, and the Greek world had a small enough geography for a rider or even a hiker to get from one sovereign city to another in a day. Nothing made change pressing; whereas in modern Europe, with its bigger territories and populations, the printing press,

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which is what eventually enabled culture to entrust itself almost wholly to written media, was one of the few inventions which really have been mothered by urgent necessity. The necessity had already existed, but no one had come forward with an answer to it, in the Roman Empire, whose great areas and population were too unwieldy to be steered with any precision by the rhetorical conventions of Roman law courts and which quickly dropped even the pretence of being governed by the rhetorical conventions of the Roman Senate.

So long as culture remains genuinely oral, it is inevitable that poems and stories will be altered as they are passed on. To that extent, a work of literature in an oral culture really does have no—that is, no single—author; and where the conventions of oral culture persist, they will go on behaving as though there were no authors even when books are in fact circulating with the authors' names on them. Because the stories that are anonymously handed down by an oral tradition count traditionally as history, which provokes pride in the whole community instead of in a single author, fiction was slow to acquire an intellectual standing in the ancient world. History books were in fact written by named historians and fictions by named authors of fiction, and yet neither classical language makes provision in its vocabulary for succinctly drawing the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. The Latin from which we derive *fiction* also, and significantly, gives us *feign*. Inventing an original story was not properly distinguished from inventing falsehoods, a circumstance in which authors of fiction might well be less anxious than they are today to own to their work. Rather than see his fiction confused with a falsehood, an author might be glad, even though this involved the loss of his own name from public view, to see his work pass under the anonymous authority of history or the hallowed, semi-mythical and thus almost anonymous authorship of Homer.

In modern Europe, printing led first to licences to print and from there to (under English law, early in the 18th century) the first stages of establishing copyright. An author was enabled first to fix his text and thus make sure he *was* the sole author of it, and presently to draw from it not only any kudos but also any royalties it might earn, though it was and remains rare for either to amount to very much. The old prestige of history lingered so forcefully that authors of fiction were for a long time (and in some quarters

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are still) less esteemed than redactors of facts. Prose fictions, which never acquired a distinctive descriptive name in the ancient world, had to wait a long time before acquiring one in the modern. Fictions long and short had been written and recognised for many years before the ambiguous name *history* and the morally ambiguous name *romance* ("romancing" is scarcely better than "feigning") were driven out, in some languages at least, by *novel* and *novella*—words which positively announce that the story is, precisely, new: that is, original to its author.

This claim to originality is not only a boast: it is an obligation. The novelist nowadays is obliged to warrant his publisher by contract that the work *is* his own. This does not mean he must be artistically original: artistic originality is acknowledged to be a virtue, but examples of it are seldom praised or even recognised until some time after they appear. It is only in a letter-of-the-law sense that a novel must be novel. Yet there are departments of fiction in which even this rule is, in a special way, tacitly abrogated. This is not a question of a literary form, which prescribes, exactly, form and not content: no one will accuse me of plagiarism if I publish a series of poems of 14 lines each, but neither does the sonnet sequence lay down what the poems must be about. Again, a literary genre does not say so much what the subject should be as what the treatment should not: not too searching, if it's light comedy; not too subtle if it's farce. Even the pulp-reading which is often said to be turned out to a formula relies less on a positive than on a negative formula—a set of boundaries which the author cannot cross without losing some of his market. There is a kind of fiction distinct, though at the edges only vaguely, from all of these. It is popular in that it makes small intellectual or imaginative demands on its readers, though its readers in some cases are, unlike pulp-readers, capable of responding to such demands when they are made by a different sort of book; but it is not necessarily popular in the sense of having large sales. Or, rather, it is rare for any one novel in the category to have a very big sale, but the category as a whole may sell enormously, relying not so much on numerous as on deeply addicted readers, who seem to need to consume one novel a week in their chosen category, much as (the comparison is not idle) Christians need to consume one communion wafer a week in their chosen denomination.

It is these fictions which are our latterday myths. Although they

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carry an author's name (or, very often, pseudonym), they shew the mythological tendency to repeat a standard pattern with variations conspicuous but superficial, and their heroes come close to the mythological type of *the* hero. For the equivalent to one metamorphosed Greek, Narcissus, we have to look to the theatre (and the theatre as depicted by the cinema), where a vedette, wearing spangled tights and singing either "On with the Motley" or "There's no business like show business," personifies show business holding up a mirror to show business. The vedette has a female version, but apart from her we have few heroines. We have no counterpart to the maiden saved from rape; we can represent her only by her opposite, the tart with the heart of gold, who is closely related to the female vedette and probably goes back mythologically to St Mary Magdalene—who herself may well be, like another passage from the New Testament, a plagiarism from the Greek theatre of Menander. Heroes, however, we have profusely: the spy (Ulysses?); the mad scientist (Prometheus, undoubtedly—via Mary Shelley's "modern Prometheus"); the gangster—who shades into the outlaw (Robin Hood, Dick Turpin, Ned Kelly); and, above all, the heroes of two vast and very distinct groups, the western and the detective story.

The hero of the western borrows from the outlaw tradition and at the same time exemplifies a modern tradition of chivalry. Like both Dick Turpin and the knight errant, he is so far inseparable from his horse that it is tempting to trace him to an ultimate mythological prototype in the centaur. It is the hero of the detective story who sticks most closely to the centre of the track beaten by the Greek hero, though he has abbreviated it at both ends. The detective story does not finish with the detective becoming king—though he *is* acclaimed by a grateful population. He is a democratic hero, a superman perhaps, but not by divine right, and his apotheosis consists of his becoming famous. (Like all democratic heroes, he has bashfully to deprecate his fame.) At the beginning of the story, the circumstances of the hero's birth are omitted; but echoes of the prophecy about the hero may remain inasmuch as the detective is forerun by his celebrity, and the conspiracy against him, which in the Greek myth happens in the hero's babyhood, may be displaced to later in the story when the criminal may feel himself threatened (as the ruler was by the hero's birth) and

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make an unsuccessful attempt on the detective's life. In essence the detective story opens about a third of the way through the heroic story, at the point where the hero comes back to the city. For the detective it is not a matter of coming *back* (though it may be of coming *again*—to another case in his career). The detective comes by chance or because he has been "called in"—he borrows his professional status chiefly from the consultant ranks of the medical profession. He is accompanied, like the Greek hero in the Greek theatre (or in the theatre of Racine), by a confidant (who borrows a touch also from the chivalrous tradition—he is the detective's squire, his Sancho Panza). In the theatre, the confidant's job is to elicit from the hero in conversation what is going on in the hero's mind and so make the heroic thoughts accessible to the audience. In the detective story he does the same job more selectively: he must elicit some of the detective's thoughts, but not those whose premature revelation to the reader would cut the story too short. The confidant is a device whereby the narrative can keep close to the detective without wholly entering his consciousness. The confidant is also there, of course, as a foil: where the confidant warns that a certain action is dangerous, the detective fearlessly insists on doing it; where the confidant is baffled, the detective astutely sees the sense of the clue. Unlike the Greek hero, the detective cannot shew forth signs which identify him as the long-lost royal son or the prophesied messiah, but he invariably shews forth distinguishing marks—idiosyncrasies of speech, dress and habits which raise him to a heroic level above the other characters in the book. Then, like the Greek hero, he proceeds to perform miracles.

In the detective's case, the miracles are very pointedly not done by magic. They rely on nothing but commonsense, which, however, the detective uses to an uncommon, heroic degree. The cause in which he uses it remains the same as that in which the Greek hero uses his magic powers and talismans—the deliverance of the population from a threat. The Greek hero comes to the city and finds the whole people grieving under menace from a monster: the detective comes to a closed community (a family, a house party, a country inn cut off by snow, a school, a campus) where a murder has been committed and the whole surviving community is under suspicion. The writer deliberately makes use of the closed

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community in order to limit the number of suspects and thereby increase the pressure of suspicion bearing down on each. It may even be that the police are already investigating the crime and about to accuse an innocent person—perhaps even the pretty girl in the story who plays the same rôle as the king's daughter who is sacrificed to the monster. In this stricken community the detective appears as the saviour. He does not go so far as the Christian hero who takes the guilt on himself. More rationally, he uses rational methods to discover the real murderer—often arranging in the penultimate scene a reconstruction of the crime which brings the murderer's guilt home in the sight of all: and thus he takes the only exhaustively convincing way available of lifting the suspicion of guilt from the community as a whole.

Like the heroic myth, this pattern is—and must be—varied. It can even establish an equivalent to local patriotism: brand loyalty. Sometimes the publisher tries to set this up for his series of books by various hands, but it is more successful, and more mythological in spirit, when it is done by the author, who makes his detective the centre of a cycle—the case of the this, the case of the that—much as King Arthur and Robin Hood are the centres of their cycles. One of the variable factors, the eccentricities and idiosyncrasies of the detective, may therefore be repeated from novel to novel; the other, the details and method of the crime, must be fresh for each novel or short story. Provided I can think up fresh variations at these two points (or have already invented a detective of my own in an earlier novel), I may offer my publisher tomorrow a novel written precisely to the outline sketched above; so far has that outline become public—anonymous—property that I can in good conscience warrant him, and he will unblinkingly accept, that it is all my own work. Yet it is in fact the plot of thousands of detective novels. Indeed, with one modification (the elaborateness of the scene where the crime is reconstructed—a scene the detective tradition has, as a matter of fact, borrowed from *Hamlet*), it is exactly the plot of the first detective story ever written.

4

That was published in 1841, written by an American and set in France. Edgar Allan Poe's decision to set *The Murders in the Rue*

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Morgue, as well as his two later detective stories, in France is usually explained by Poe's great interest in and knowledge of French culture. Strictly speaking, however, those only *enabled* him to set his fictions there; they do not in themselves provide a positive impulsion, for which I think we ought to look in a combination of history and psychology. Briefly, I think that Poe set his detective stories in France because the French Revolution had been set in France.

Moreover, I think it was the French Revolution which was the positive impulsion towards the particular invention of the detective story by Poe and its general adoption as a myth pattern. Here again, there is a distinction between what positively impelled and what merely enabled detective fiction to come into being. Obviously, just as novelists could not set their stories in the neighbourhood of fictitious gasometers until real gasometers had been invented, fictitious detectives had to wait until real detectives and detection had been invented—which happened in England and in France (where the organisation of an effective police force was a direct result of the Revolution) about 1800. But we are entitled to seek also a positive factor which turned the real-life invention into a much repeated fictitious myth. No such factor seems to exist in gasometers. Evidently the detective, as fictionalised by Poe at that particular moment in history, contained a peculiar myth-creating potential.

Sherlock Holmes, who is still probably the most famous detective hero and the one who commands the greatest brand loyalty, speaks on one occasion of "my scientific methods"; and they are indeed scientific, but in a restricted sense. They hardly touch on experimental science. Indeed, it was probably in order to borrow some of the kudos of experimental science, which did not rightfully belong to it, that detective fiction evolved its elaborate reconstruction scene, which is at once an experiment in the technique of the murder and, like the play scene in *Hamlet,* an experiment on the criminal's guilty psychology. Again, Sherlock Holmes's methods touch, but only lightly, on technology. His amateur laboratory is sketched in very cursorily indeed: "the scientific charts upon the wall, the acid-charred bench of chemicals" are enough—the enumeration of his tools goes straight on to "the violin-case leaning in the corner" (which, in the philistine world

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Holmes inhabits, counts as one of his eccentricities). Only once in the 12 stories in his *Case Book* do we actually come upon Holmes "bending for a long time over a low-power microscope." In fact Holmes himself gives a narrower and more accurate description of his method when he calls it "my familiar method of logical analysis." And "analysis" is the word Poe chooses to epitomise the method of the prototypical detective Dupin in the prototypical case in the Rue Morgue.

In other words, although the detective may call in "laboratory aids," they are as a rule amateur ones of the sort you might have found in the home of a dilettante, philosopher or man of letters in the 18th century—Goethe, say, or Voltaire himself, who expressed his ideal as "passer d'une expérience de physique à un opéra ou à une comédie." 19th-century figure though he is, the detective preserves the fashion of the 18th-century Enlightenment in carrying elegantly a veneer at least of both arts and sciences. Dupin is something of a classical scholar; Holmes has his violin as well as his microscope. As for the methods which the detective's scientific smattering helps out, they are less those of science at large than of scientific scholarship, the methods of the historian, the art historian, the textual critic. They consist of pure deductive logic. They are remarkable and specialised only in the rigour and thoroughness of the mind which applies them, a mind which considers no detail beneath and no reputation above scrutiny, and which refuses to accept preconceptions and conventions about what a thing *must* be but insists on enquiring for itself what it *is*.

Here, too, the detective preserves the 18th-century spirit. His habit of looking at content instead of nimbus is the essence of Candide's near-naif vision. Candide is still surprised enough by everything to take nothing for granted. On the battlefield where others have been trained to see honour and glory, Candide sees the actual content of the ground—"des cervelles . . . répandues sur la terre à côté de bras et de jambes coupés." It is by a narrowing of Candide's vision to a particular problem that, in the too-familiar-to-be-remarked-by-anyone-else figure of the postman, the detective sees the one person who could have entered and left the scene virtually invisibly. And in fact Voltaire himself did, in another of his naif heroes, Zadig, anticipate the detective's methods—an instance mentioned in histories of detective fiction but, quite rightly, disallowed because Zadig's deductions do not help solve a crime. (In

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fact they get him unjustly accused of one.) The crime had, so to speak, not yet been committed.

In the widest and most social sense Voltaire might have maintained that his own deductive acumen *was* deployed towards exposing a crime, since it was used to the end he expressed as "écrasons l'infâme." His was only the nimblest hammer in the labour of demolition carried out by the 18th-century Enlightenment as a whole. The weapons of naif vision, ridicule, irony, scholarship, textual criticism and logic were used to bring down the whole numinous superstructure, social and theological, of Christendom. Deep buried under the rubble was the guilt European man had consciously entertained ever since he accepted exclusively the Christian hero who died for him. Having refuted the supernatural, the Enlightenment pinned its curiosity and hopes to the natural, by which, since its concept of Nature was barely biological and not at all psychological, it meant chiefly the material—hence all those dilettante hours at the amateur laboratory bench. However, natural philosophy was not yet wholly separated from philosophy, and the philosophers were able to slip between the physicist and his lens the notion that the Nature under inspection must be not merely natural but naturally benevolent. Man having shed his supernatural soul (together with the myth of his Fall), the benevolence of Nature logically extended to human nature, too. The tyranny of Christian superstition exploded, man was pronounced not guilty of original sin and found to be inherently good—though in practice corrupted by unnatural tyrannies. Unfortunately, at the end of the century which had pulled off this enormous intellectual feat, its findings were tested in an experiment. The monarchy which had tyrannised France by virtue of feudal numinous awe was removed, and French citizens were set free to—as Pope had urged at the beginning of the century—"follow Nature": whereupon they proclaimed the noblest slogan ever coined by a body politic and, setting up the guillotine, began severing one another's heads from their bodies in a way that would have horrified the ex-tyrant had they not earlier done the same to him. And, having leapt out of the frying pan into the fire, they proved unable to call up any fire engine except Napoleon, in whose wars cannon- and musket-fire eventually killed far greater quantities of them than tyrant and Terror combined.

It is impossible to exaggerate the scar left in our cultural con-

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sciousness to this day by the French Revolution. The generation immediately after it became all but emotionally and intellectually prostrate in its effort to sew together the lips of the trauma. The real-life heroes of this period are the first of the anti-heroes, tormented and maudit; they are exemplified in Kierkegaard, Newman, Poe himself and Poe's disciple Baudelaire. Reason, it seemed, had led to man's proving himself not benevolent but monstrous by nature. And yet reason had not been wrong: it was impossible to go back with genuine belief to the numinous world: or, supposing one could force oneself to do so, that, as Kierkegaard experienced, was merely to succumb on irrational instead of rational grounds to the conviction of man's guilt. Half of Poe's violently dichotomised imagination was given to creating nightmares in which doom descends in punishment of a guilt whose source is not understood; and the other half was given to constructing stories—those about Dupin's detection, and also Poe's cryptogram and puzzle stories—in which a mystery proves understandable and soluble in strictly rational terms. And in the detective stories, the only ones which laid down the pattern of a myth, it is guilt which is rationally understood and traced to its source.

Having created his detective-hero-deliverer, Poe even tried to make him deliver Poe and solve the mystery of Poe's own dichotomy between imagination and reason. The narrative of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* is preceded by a discourse on the analytical faculty, in the course of which Poe elaborates Coleridge's antithesis between fancy and imagination in such a way (a way that might have had the approval of Coleridge himself, another of the tormented romantic-rationalists of the period) as to bring imagination and rationality into analogy and almost identification with one another: "It will be found, in fact, that the ingenious are always fanciful, and the *truly* imaginative never otherwise than analytic."

Reason, when liberated in the French Revolution, seemed to have laid human nature under the imputation of blood guilt. What Poe invented in the first detective story was a hero who delivers the community—the inhabitants of the "quartier St Roch" —from just that imputation, and does it not by supernatural means, which would involve a reaction to the ancien régime no longer possible, but by a *better* application of reason. One of the

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strictest rules of the detective story convention is that the supernatural may be (in the words of Dorothy Sayers, quoted by Howard Haycraft in his history of the detective story) "evoked only to be dispelled." The rule was obeyed by Sherlock Holmes ("This Agency stands flatfooted upon the ground . . . No ghosts need apply"—this despite his creator's belief in spiritualism) and had been laid down by Dupin in the prototype: "It is not too much to say that neither of us believe in praeternatural events. Madame and Mademoiselle L'Espanaye were not destroyed by spirits."

Disdaining the supernatural, the detective disdains also any last attenuated rag of feudal superstition: the last wisp of the heroic tradition whereby the triumphant hero becomes a king or even a god was disdainfully shrugged away when Holmes refused a knighthood. Nevertheless, the detective *is* (witness his disdain) an aristocrat—but a natural one, just as he is merely rational but more incisively so than common people. On a small scale he represents the fantasy which, of all fantasies, post-Revolutionary society wished *could* be true: he offers a way of returning to the aristocratic principle without violating reason. His superiority does not rest on breeding, which is wholly irrational, or on talent, which people may disagree about and which cannot be rationally proved, but on a process of reasoning which, when he explains it, can be followed and concurred in by everyone—including, by implication, a jury, that microcosm of a democratic society. The detective's superiority cannot be rationally refuted, and therefore he is justified, as the aristocrat by blood was not, in exhibiting his eccentricities and his essentially aristocratic disregard of the bourgeois reaction to them. In two cardinal instances, Holmes and Dupin, one of the main eccentricities is keeping irregular hours —the aristocratic mark of the man who does not have to go out to work next morning. Ordinary, blunt-witted rationality—indeed, flat-footed rationality—is represented in the detective myth by the men who do have to go out to work, who investigate the crime by routine methods as part of the routine of their job and not because the problem (or an old friend or a pretty woman) has appealed to them: the flat-foots, the police.

In life the police came first and were aped by the private detective: but it is significant that in fiction the detective was a private eye from the start. Later detective fictions may deviate from this

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pattern in fact but not in spirit. The fictitious detective is sometimes a policeman, but he is almost invariably an unorthodox one, whose methods disturb his orthodox colleagues or superiors (this happens to the young Maigret) or bring him into rivalry with another department—which the French judicial system in particular makes plausible. Even English detective writers can postulate a rivalry between Scotland Yard and the local force; Simenon positively pits the Police Judiciaire against the Palais de Justice. The middle-aged Maigret has a permanent rival in the judge Coméliau, who "s'était toujours méfié du commissaire et de ses méthodes." The rational-democratic essence of the detective hero is brought out in the fact that between Maigret and Coméliau there is a social contrast: Maigret is plebeian born, but an aristocrat of reason; Coméliau is by breeding an aristocrat but limited to "le point de vue de son milieu." By going beyond police routine and evolving his own unorthodox methods, Maigret becomes, as it were, a private detective who, needing to earn a living, happens to be employed by the police. He sticks to the myth pattern in which both the aboriginal Dupin and the central Holmes are private detectives (Holmes already using the word "Agency" for his partnership with his slow-witted confidant). Holmes is the aristocratic consultant who receives fees, the police the routine artisans who are paid wages. Dupin actually mentions the famous real-life French policeman Vidocq—as "a good guesser, and a persevering man," who, being "without educated thought . . . erred continually."

In fact, the competition between the detective hero and the police is indispensable to the myth, because it is the police, with their propensity to err continually, who are the threat to the population of the story. The pattern is already firm set in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue,* where the police arrest an innocent man. The lax reasoning of the police in detective fiction is the inheritor of the lax reasoning whereby the Revolutionary juries condemned innocent men; the detective is the hero who rescues the innocent —not, like the aristocratic Scarlet Pimpernel or Napoleon himself, who founded a new aristocracy as well as a new tyranny, by a plunge into reaction and irrationality, but by superior rationality.

To recognise the detective as primarily a deliverer is in itself to refute—or at least greatly shift the emphases of—the theory

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most usually advanced as a psychological account of the detective story's popularity. There is, of course, another but this time quite superficial theory, namely that it is popular simply as a puzzle; but that is easily disposed of, since it does not explain why the puzzle grew into a literary myth. Poe's purely puzzle stories laid down no myth pattern and have few imitators. It seems that the actual content of the detective puzzle, unlike, say, the significance of the words which answer the clues in a crossword puzzle, is a material and indispensable element. This is in fact assumed by the usual psychological theory—which also assumes, however, that the important part of the content is violent death: the death of the victim and then the death of the murderer in expiation. According to this theory, the detective story is an opportunity for reader and writer to commit at least one murder in their imaginations; the writer is said to have a "nostalgie de la boue," and both reader and writer are said to have a "blood-lust" which can be "sublimated by reading and writing fiction murders." The words are those of "Nicholas Blake," a detective story writer who contributed an introduction to the Howard Haycraft book (*Murder for Pleasure*) I have already cited. The book was published in 1942, and the introduction by "Nicholas Blake" goes on to suggest that, had the Germans sublimated their blood-lust through detective fiction, they "would certainly have less zest for murdering real Poles." This "certainty" is supported by two arguments: that the Nazis banned imported detective fiction; and that in any case detective stories were not popular in Germany. These facts (if the second *is* a fact—after all, it was in the German language that *Emil and the Detectives* carried the detective myth to the very nursery) cannot have been very telling even at the time. (The Nazis banned a good range of cultural imports, not all of which offer an opportunity for sublimating murder.) Now that we have seen some of the post-1942 behaviour of the countries, America, England and France, where the detective story undoubtedly is popular, they do not seem a very solid support for so large a hypothesis.

The view that the reader commits murder in his imagination is not always stated explicitly, yet it seems to be implied by a very commonly drawn contrast. "Nicholas Blake" himself, in the same introduction, draws it when he asks "From what dark incentive, by

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what devious and secret psychological passages have detection writers—timid and law-abiding persons for the most part, who faint at the sight of blood and tremble when the eye of a policeman is turned upon them—first set out upon the sinister paths of crime fiction?" A hundred other cliché-writers have said the same thing in not very different words. It all goes back, I rather think, to some journalistic commonplace of the thirties, which still turns up in the English press on Sundays, to the effect that detective stories are the favourite reading of bishops. What with these (presumably) Anglican bishops, the fictitious detective Father Brown and the detective fiction writer Father Ronald Knox, it must have seemed in England in the first three decades of this century that detective aptitude was conferred by the laying on of hands.

As a matter of fact, to see so prompt a contrast between murder and the priesthood is an example of our un-Candide-like vision, our habit of heeding people's professions about their professions rather than the content of their professions. Were we to see the priest as a man whose daily routine is to feed first himself and then others with the body and blood of a person who was tortured to death, we might think it less surprising if the priest's imagination *were* blood-boltered. Yet if the detective myth really is analogous to the heroic one, then in fact the priests must be acquitted of blood-thirst at least in their spare-time reading. The detective myth appertains to a different priestly function.

The place of the detective story in our society does distantly imply a general confession of blood guilt—but of guilt which is there before, and quite independently of, the story. Reading the story does not bring the guilt into existence: rather, it is the existence of the guilt which impels the repeated writing and reading of the story in its many variations. The detective myth, which did not exist before it, is a repeated admission that the French Revolution took place. It admits a wish to kill as inherent in human nature, inasmuch as it repeatedly builds a fictitious situation in which all the human beings involved need to be cleared of the suspicion of guilt: we might all be murderers. (Before the French Revolution it was possible to disbelieve that proposition.) But the detective story does not pile yet more guilt on to its readers by seducing them into imaginatively participating and concurring in a murder. On the contrary: its form is carefully calculated to make

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participation impossible. By the very terms of the puzzle, the reader cannot follow the act of murder through the consciousness of the murderer.

Some recent detective stories do slip in a passage seen through the eyes of the murderer, but he has to remain anonymous to the reader—a device which in itself tends to set him beyond the reader's power to identify himself with the characters; and the device is usually employed to arouse fear in the reader of the person who is least identifiable with oneself, the stranger, the prowler who may jump out at you; indeed, if anything, the device identifies the reader with a potential victim rather than the murderer. The reader cannot be in a position wholly to identify himself with the murderer in a detective story until the story is over. Only when the puzzle is solved does the reader come into possession of the facts—the murderer's name and the technique of the crime—which enable him to put himself in the position of the criminal during the act; and by then the act is finished and done with. If the reader can follow the murderer's consciousness at the time, then the story is by definition not a detective story but a thriller or a psychological thriller like *Crime and Punishment.*

In the detective story proper, murder is less an act than stage machinery. It sets the scene and starts the story moving. (Further murders may re-set the scene and give the story a fresh impetus.) More often than not the murder happens off-stage, frequently before the story opens. Neither the act of murder nor the hunting down of the murderer (which in societies which still practise capital punishment usually implies a further murder, committed in vengeance for the original one) occupies the centre of the narrative stage, because it is not on those that the suspense in the story rests. The suspense is generated by the race between the detective's powers and the doom of unjust suspicion which is descending on the population. Blood there has, admittedly, to be; admittedly, without a pre-existing blood guilt, there would have been no story; and usually a murderer has to be indicted because that is the only way to provide the rest of the cast with an acquittal wholly satisfying to reason. But the psychological purpose of the story is summed up in that acquittal. The detective myth exists not to provoke or endorse guilt but to dissipate it. The solution pronounces the general absolution.

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Usually that can be done only at the cost of excepting one person and accusing him of murder, but it would be wrong to think the myth exacts his blood and makes the reader an imaginative participator in the act of vengeance. The murderer is required as a piece of machinery, without which the solution would not be plausible. The narrative is often a touch shame-faced about its need to employ him—more shame-faced, in fact, than it is about requiring a victim to be murdered to start the story off in the first place. If that often happens off-stage at or before the start, the murderer, once detected, is positively rushed off-stage at the end. His death on the scaffold, so far from being gloried in, is scarcely hinted at. In this the author may be following the sound commercial practice of not offending the susceptibilities of any class of readers, even if it is probably a minority, when there is no need to; and commercial practice certainly makes it clear that the pattern of the story does *not* need an emphatic and bloodthirsty revenge against the murderer. Or the writer may be acting on his own convictions, many detective writers being no more in favour of capital punishment than of murder. (And in one notable instance at least, when a detective writer conspicuously played the detective in real life, it was with the same essential purpose as the fictitious detective, namely to establish innocence. Conan Doyle worked strenuously to clear the wrongly convicted Oscar Slater—just as Voltaire earlier gave his deductive and literary brilliance to clearing Callas and Sirven.) With no matter what motive, the detective writer regularly makes not the most but the least of the criminal's punishment. If he plausibly can, he often takes a comparatively humane way out by suggesting that the murderer will be found insane or by allowing him to commit suicide.

Even the rule that someone must be guilty is not absolutely essential to the myth pattern. All that really matters to it is innocence. This is clear from the first detective story, which laid the pattern down. It is highly significant that, in that story, there are murders but (although Poe may have intended an allegory about the bestial aspect of human nature and certainly perpetrated a slander against orang-utan nature) what the solution shews is that there is no murderer.

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BENJAMIN DE MOTT

Dirty Words?

WHAT'S FRESH? WHAT'S HOT? what swings with the writing mob? Shhh, baby, not so *loud*. Home and away, among artists and hacks, stillness is In. The move is toward muteness. *Silence* is the boffo new literary word. . . .

Every man for himself, of course, in manipulating this Word. In England and West Germany the anti-language line is episte-logico-semantical. The most fashionable English lady novelist of the moment began her career by creating a genius called "The Silencer," a chap who insists that:

> Only the greatest men can speak and still be truthful. . . . Only the strongest can rise against [the] weight [of theory]. For most of us, for almost all of us, truth can be attained, if at all, only in silence. (Iris Murdoch, *Under The Net*)

And the coming young German poet, Helmut Heissenbuttel, asks himself:

> —does to distinguish mean to distinguish what from what and someone from someone or simply that it depends and how does one distinguish . . . ?

Whereas in France and America you work the vein by coming on hard against orators. Henri Michaux, who for years has been cultivating a mystique of the Inaudible, holds that the clearest mark of meanness and stupidity is adeptness at public speech. (In *Light Through Darkness* this writer defends hashish on the ground that the hashishee is a fast man at spotting oratorical sin:

> One day when during one of these [hashish] moments I was looking at a study in a review having a very limited, almost secret circulation, the study by an erudite young philosopher, I heard something that sounded like the murmur of crowds gathered to listen to these words. Well, Well! The sentence, even when later I read it cold, philosophic though it appeared, was . . . a sentence that could never come from the pen of one who had not caressed the idea of appearing . . . on a platform.)

And J. D. Salinger, zenning against words here at home, lays it

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down about the Gettysburg Address that if Lincoln had been "absolutely honest," he would "simply have come forward and shaken his fist at his audience" and walked away without uttering a word.

But while national differences exist, they are not so pronounced as to threaten the fundamental unity of the language baiters—or to inhibit criticism from celebrating the emergence of a new international literary theme. American partisans of romantic-existential-apocalyptic fiction have, in the course of their celebrations, gone so far as to discover a "tradition" of holy silence-mongering in modern literature. Some among them even declare that language-baiting nowadays reflects "nothing less than the desire to redeem Western values."[1]

The latter opinion hasn't yet won universal assent, partly because people who back it produce charts of literary "influence," and pairings of literary men that add up to chaos. (Thomas Mann and William Burroughs, for example, or Coleridge and Joseph Heller.) Yet this school of critics is by no means insignificant. It has sacred texts—Nietzsche, *Civilization and Its Discontents,* and Norman O. Brown. It offers an uncomplicated version of the genesis and meaning of the attack on public language. (The claim is that the attack can only be understood as selfless, life-renewing protest against repressive abstraction and order.) And the figures and ideas honored by the school are difficult to dislodge from privileged status. Novelists who pontificate about matters other than the limits of language sooner or later have to face the standard critical queries. How does the story earn the statement? what allowance has been made for experience that contradicts the generalization? But the writer who takes up the theme of silence as glory (or speechmaking as sin) enjoys cosy immunity from the start. Words are the one means of justifying the contention that language is the foe of honesty and reality: how then can you expect a word-hater to explain his hatred?

There are, however, limits to this immunity—or, rather, there

1 The phrase occurs in an *American Scholar* essay (Summer 1963) by Ihab Hassan about "the growing distrust of language as a medium of expression, and [the] distrust of form, which has impelled certain modern writers to cultivate chance and disorder. . . ." Hassan discusses a wide range of writers—French Symbolists, Absurd Playwrights, New Wave Novelists, Corso-Kerouac and Salinger himself. Warmly appreciative of the word-baiters, he remarks that "in this strident era of over-communication . . . we are more likely to perish by the word than by the sword, and least of all to perish by a loving silence."

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ought to be limits to it. No secular literary theme, international or otherwise, benefits from credulous assessment; when literary motives are sanctified or buried beneath fan-letter cant about the "desire to redeem Western values," they become that much more difficult not only for readers but for writers themselves to understand. The need of the moment is for a start toward an historical account of how the word-baiters and silence-mongerers came to be what they are, a survey of the cultural facts underlying bookish assertions that human speech is valueless. Only when this information is in hand will there be much to stop critics turned campaign biographers from transforming authorship into a confidence game.

Where would such an account begin? With politics, social change, and the sociology of writing, of course. To say this isn't to deny that a good number of the passionate near-mutes in romantic literature have quasi-religious significance. Symbols like Eliot's "still point"—or Wordsworth's Leechgatherer, or Keats's Urn, or Poe's Raven—illustrate the connection between the imagination of wordlessness and the longing for transcendence. And in the great novelists—Lawrence, Conrad, Tolstoy—there are reflections on the inadequacies of language that stand as footnotes to a large scale argument against rationalism. (One lesson of *Anna Karenina* is that a man must learn not to define, not to attach words to his feelings, not to state the terms of ideal experience. "What am I about?" Levin asks at the end. "Knowledge, sure, unattainable by reason, has been revealed to me, to my heart, and here am I obstinately trying to express that knowledge in words. . . .")

But while it is clear that the impulse to deprecate language can sometimes be traced to religious hunger for meaning inexpressible in abstractions, it is equally clear that attacks upon the word often have direct social and political reference. Their focus is the lower-class man who has learned to speak up, learned to make himself felt despite the poverty of his birth, education, and training. Flaubert crowded his pages with such men; nowhere in the *Sentimental Education* does his irony carry more contempt than in the descriptions of the citizen-orators of 1848. Zola was interested in the type (in *Germinal* Etienne's virtue is smutched when he shifts from the role of silent witness of suffering to that of the platform agitator). And in the Grand Inquisitor Dostoevsky brought the character of the wordy usurper to the summit of its development. The Inquisi-

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tor's denunciation of Jesus pours on, a furious tide of intellectual passion, for thousands of words; the Listener does not speak. When it is over the Inquisitor sees that:

> The Prisoner had been listening intently to him all the time, looking gently into his face and evidently not wishing to say anything in reply. The old man would have liked him to say something, however bitter and terrible. But he suddenly approached the old man and kissed him gently on his bloodless aged lips. That was all his answer.

The writer thus announces that true virtue is wordless. And, through the Inquisitor's speech, he establishes that, in men of power, eloquence is the outward sign of a monstrous inner sin of selfishness.

Why would a writer choose to make this point? In part because of the conviction that, in the post-revolutionary era, eloquence has become a means rather than an end, a gimmick for "improper advancement" rather than a decent symbol of constituted authority (like the mace and robe). The counterpart of this conviction is the belief that in the new world those who manipulate the word are climbing, unentitled, essentially inferior ranters—men who cannot win the authority they covet except by stimulating the lowest self of a mass audience. But it would be a mistake to pretend that either conviction is born of a wholly disinterested, objective contemplation of the run of historical events. Novelists and poets attempt to persuade their audiences to share these convictions not only because the latter are "correct," but because public acceptance of them will advance the literary interest in a vital power struggle.

That the literary interest has been in grave need of advancement for a long while is a commonplace among students of changes in the relation between men of power and men of words. In pre-revolutionary societies of mass illiteracy, possession of the word was a strong guarantee of power. The writer could support his sense of his "difference" not merely by consulting his muse or by pointing at his books, but by reflecting on the quality of his relation to power, and on his position in the social hierarchy. The difference was, in fact, less immediately psychological than socio-economic. Only the elite manipulated symbols: governors and wordmen were, in relative terms, at one.

But the word belonged to everyman after the flood, as already

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observed. (A half hour session of Flaubert's "Club of Intellect" includes orations from adolescents, printers, lunatic professors, farmer-priests, shopmen, wine-salesmen, and masons—not to mention passing drunks and bums.) And, harassed by the "competition" of people who only a generation before hadn't dared even to think, much less to talk or write, writers intent upon maintaining a position were badly placed. One alternative was to search out, from among a muddle of possible constituencies, some comparatively inarticulate group that might still be considered "in need of a voice." The other was to offer a representation of the world of universal talk that established *silence,* the eschewal of words, as the defining characteristic of the natural aristocrat.

More than one major novelist of the century refused to be trapped into an irrevocable choice between these options. Dickens speaks for a group he imagines to be inarticulate ("Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. . ."), as though resigned to a position away from the center of power. But many of his symbols and comic inventions express longing for the obliteration of the racketing voices which, in the new civilization, diffuse the power of the word. Conrad takes as a theme the emptiness of the rhetoric of "Christian imperialism," but simultaneously makes himself a spokesman for an undiscovered, uncounted constituency: the exploited pagan horde.

In the long sweep of post-revolutionary time, however, it grew increasingly difficult even for the most gifted and self-assured artist to keep his poise in the face of endlessly multiplying scribblers and oratorical fantasts. And the well-known result was that writers in great numbers gave up the search for constituencies, and rejected the notion that the attention of a man of power was worth striving for.

That this choice did not mean a total loss of audience isn't mysterious. Post-revolutionary events both intellectual and social helped to create a climate favorable to mockery of the pretensions of magistrates and governors. Late nineteenth century ideas of culture, class and consciousness weakened faith in governors as men of another order of being. (*All* men are bound by myth, repression, and economic interest.) And the governors themselves spent little effort in maintaining the social forms which, even after a revolution, might have lent special authority to their words. Their

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slobbish behavior practically enforced upon all ascendant democrats a view of balanced sentences and elevated speech as dressup. And the prevalence of this view in turn guaranteed that the displaced writer who leered at speechmakers (he'll be loosening that collar later on, why not now?) would run no risk of offending his audience.

But to be in contact with such an audience—climbers, outsiders, and other ordinary folk who read with their lips—was small satisfaction for literary men. So long as a novelist merely teased managerial or legislative chatterers and rhetoricians, after the fashion of Mark Twain, he functioned as the voice of the democratic wave that had swamped him; by hinting that leaders were just folks, he reassured citizens that no word and no power could be higher than theirs. To clear a way toward a place of distinction comparable to the one he had lost, the writer needed first of all to dissociate himself completely from barroom-barbershop opinionators, Rotary-ranters, and letters-to-the-editor men on the one hand, and from the ghost-written culture of the false elite on the other. He could take a step toward this end by adopting tones of detached generalizing contempt, and by dramatizing the powerlessness of the new officeholders. (The dominant theme of the nineteenth century political novel is that of the unmanageability of events, military, diplomatic, economic.) But the direct course was to find means of effecting a redistribution of the property—language itself—whose reality as power was most palpable to him as a literary man.

Just here lay the usefulness of the theme of silence, and of the new polarity of abstraction vs. existence. The invention of a super- or anti-language about language (one that devalued the mass-owned word) could not be expected to refurbish the old alliance of governors and littérateurs, or to reopen old lines of communication. The terms of the super-language were magical, exempt from the "limits of words," incapable of being blended into debate in the great chamber of "lies" inhabited by managers of public affairs. But the new language could bring about the collapse of distinctions between the false elite and the masses; it enabled the writer to stand before his audience as a priest before a congregation of identical human beings, all of whom were inferior to him by virtue of the inadequacies of their language and their unawareness

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thereof. And this was, for literary men, an essential turn of events. As long as the high public estimate of the value of public words ("free speech") went uncontested, he couldn't raise his voice, hence could not rise. But when that estimate was cast in doubt, a dozen possibilities emerged. In the act of calling for an end to abstraction he could set taboos on the language of the mighty as well as of the base. By directing his fury at the sin of "hypostatization" he could shame the world for having failed to give him its word. And by creating silence as the only conceivable redeemer for non-literary man, he might well restore the uniqueness stripped from him by egalitarians at the hour of the socialization of the word.

Every reader will think of his own examples of work touched by these motives and themes. Eliot's *Coriolan,* read as a political rather than religious poem, is a perfect paradigm of the politics of silence: a voiceless true leader is set in absolute opposition to a quacking vox populi. Powerless orators and masscult monologuists are prime objects of mockery in Joyce's *Ulysses:* one function of myth in this book is to dramatize differences between the world as it was when the elite owned the word and as it is when every shopgirl has a "literary imagination" (Nausicaa against Gerty McDowell). And the shape of Joyce's career betrays a determination to exact public acknowledgment that his language is remote from that of governors and proles. But the most telling evidence of the reality of the themes in question is that serious books have actually taken as their subject the writer's need for a unique "line" about language that will deliver him from impotence.

Consider for example the novel of Iris Murdoch's that was quoted earlier. The chief figures of *Under the Net* are, by name, Jake Donaghue and Hugo Belfounder; the relation between the two is described by the narrator as "the central theme of [the] book." At the opening of the tale Donaghue is a talented but feckless mooching hack and translator, penniless, homeless, unlucky in love; Belfounder, on the other hand, is a powerful manager, blessed with a "unique intellectual and moral quality," lucky in love, and wealthy (he has made successive fortunes in the armament and motion picture industries, because he inspires "universal confidence" and has "an iron nerve"). Jake Donaghue's

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friends attribute his failure to develop his literary gifts to laziness, but, as the course of the story makes clear, that explanation is too easy. The fact is that early in his writing life Jake became acquainted with Belfounder, and was dazzled by what seemed an overwhelmingly original and persuasive set of ideas about language. Belfounder's ideas are the staple stuff of the language baiter: words are but a veil, "all stories [are] lies," "*actions* [alone] don't lie," "truth can be attained . . . only in silence." But they have a paralyzing effect upon Jake Donaghue. He cannot discount them as products of writerly bitterness about mass-age men of action who cynically cut themselves in on the power of the word. Belfounder isn't a writer but a man of action: he not only possesses power *and* the word but even, as it appears, the girl Jake loves: he inspires terror not analysis. Jake does, in the early sequel, flee in fear from Belfounder; he avoids appointments with him, eventually changes his domicile in order to escape the man's eye. But the flight that counts, as an expression of terror, is the retreat from a career: Jake disowns his ambition and lapses into relative silence.

Viewed as a dramatization of deficiencies of modern literary power, this novelistic situation presents no severe problems of interpretation. Miss Murdoch's story is about the theft of the muse by the manager—a flat reversal, as it were, of Camus's dictum that "we must make . . . our poets into captains of industry"; its one bold trick is the identification of the muse with the theme of silence itself. The latter theme is, to repeat, both shield and weapon for the post-revolutionary writer; by deprecating the word he (in fantasy) seizes a place above the word-owning masses, and above the false elite (managers, men of action) as well. And therefore the expropriation of the theme by a manager is a double frustration for a writer—an event out of which much dramatic capital can be made. The capital is not wasted in *Under the Net.* Time and again the novelist brings into sight a character or event eligible for the irony of a word-baiter (mass-age political oratory is ridiculed in a chaotic scene presenting a labor union leader incompetently addressing a crowd of workers on a movie set—from a prop Roman chariot). And time and again Jake Donaghue the writer witnesses the event, or observes the character, in the company of the word-baiting man of power—and suffers accord-

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ingly, since such occasions deprive him even of an illusion that his responses are unique.

But *Under the Net* is about recovery as well as about theft. Absorbed at the start with Donaghue's frustrations, the book subsequently recounts his progress towards a renewal of faith. And, as might be expected, the moment of crisis in the progress occurs when Jake recovers silence as a theme of his own creation.

The novelist works with some ingenuity to prepare for this moment. She assigns the position of narrator to her hero, the writer, thereby freeing herself from the obligation to explain fully his mistakes of perception. The scenes in which the man of power seems, to Jake's mind, to be developing his subtle views about the limits of language are done largely in indirect discourse. These views are at length made known to the reader through excerpts from a book of dialogues called *The Silencer* that Jake himself has composed, in theory as a representation of Belfounder's thinking. By a careful manipulation of events the revelation of Belfounder's reaction to this document is postponed to the end of the tale. And before that moment occurs the reader has been offered several hints that Jake Donaghue is a self-deceived character who perversely attributes to the man of action ideas that are in fact his own.

But despite the elaborate preparations, the turnabout encounter between writer and manager comes off badly. The manager does insist that the ideas about language in *The Silencer* actually belong to the writer, not to him. But the scene in which he makes this declaration is awkward and unconvincing. The once self-sufficient man of power becomes, too suddenly, a figure ridden with envy of the literary artist. ("Wherever did you get all those ideas from? . . . Your thing [*The Silencer*] was so clear. I learnt an awful lot from it.") The explanation of Jake's original awe is lame. (" 'The trouble with you, Jake,' said [Belfounder], 'is that you're far too impressed by people. You were far too impressed by me. . . . You can . . . create things . . . I never made a thing in my life.' ") And the reversal of positions—Belfounder humiliated, the writer elevated—is melodramatic in execution. (The manager gives up his power and goes off to a job in the provinces as a watchmaker, and the writer returns to *The Silencer* and his other manuscripts, aware at last that the themes expressed in these works are not only

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his own but, potentially, the substance of significant works of art.)

The likelihood is that the author of *Under the Net* was clear neither about her ideas nor about the best means of embodying them in believable sequences of human action. The ambiguity of the arguments "for and against language" is one visible sign of unease; Miss Murdoch is far more comfortable when dealing with linguistic issues as part of intellectual history (see her criticism), than when confronting them as determinants of human behavior. Other signs are the contrived quality of the denouement, and the frenzied injection of brawls and high-jinks (the book is filled with what became, in the Angry novelists, the standard junk of mid-twentieth century picaresque). But the question of the quality of the book is for the moment irrelevant. What matters is that *Under the Net* is, demonstrably, a narrative based on the assumption that possessiveness about the word and resentment of the expropriation of language by non-writers are genuine facts of feeling for the modern writer. And the action of the book is ruled from beginning to end by a conception of the theme of silence as both strategy and therapy—the one means by which writers can effect the emasculation of their oppressors and the restoration of their own potency.

The same uses of the theme are visible in the fiction of J. D. Salinger. The case of Seymour Glass is, to be sure, superficially dissimilar to that of Jake Donaghue. Seymour's creator presents himself as a man concerned not primarily about writers but about the common fate of sensitive men. And as a consequence his manner of articulating the theme of literary power-through-silence is more oblique than Iris Murdoch's. Yet, as everyone knows, Salinger is not in the habit of keeping distance between himself and his sensitive protagonists; their agonies become his, the torments of a writer caged in the modern world. And his stories insist that the least tolerable of these agonies is the endless, meaningless, hopelessly barren yammering of the figures who conceive themselves to be the practical managers of this world.

Few things are plainer in Salinger's fiction than his desire that his complaint against non-literary or pseudo-literary wordmongers be understood as a religious gesture, a protest against selfishness and for organic existence. The Glass family stories are decorated with a score of epigraphs, excerpts from fables, and aphorisms whose burden is the incommensurateness of language to life;

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Seymour himself insists that "the human voice conspires to desecrate every thing on earth." And enthusiasts of Salinger have made much of these decorations, even arguing that the work they adorn develops a "sacramental notion of silence." But while there is no denying the intensity of the writer's feeling for silence as a value, neither is there reason to doubt that this value, as expressed in a Salinger story, is a strategy as well as a sacrament. The world of these stories is composed of two camps: people of apparent power, people of apparent powerlessness. The villainous wordmongers—brisk, manipulative, self-confident, exactly rendered managers—are characters of apparent power. The sensitive word-baiting protagonists—writers all in essence (whether by profession or in embryo)—are people of apparent powerlessness, helpless types whom the yakking managers ceaselessly harry into and out of classrooms, restrooms, hotels, bathtubs, marriages, careers. . . . And it is in the context of this seeming imbalance of power that both the human and political dimensions of Salinger's protest against the word appear. The aim of the protest isn't only to lay on the record an impersonal plea for non-abstract existence; it is also to recover magical potencies for literary man—by devaluing the chatter of the Lane Coutells of the world, figures of phony authority and competence.

Nor is the protest limited to canting undergraduates or dirty word scribblers or efficient Moms—witness the ruminations about Lincoln and Gettysburg mentioned above. These diary entries of Seymour's have bearings at once broader and subtler than those of the ordinary paradox of purity (we are all murderers, none of us is innocent enough to speak). When Seymour envisions absolute honesty at Gettysburg as incapable of more than a fist-shaking gesture, one of his effects is to characterize the honest *political* leader as a man unutterably remote, separated both from the people he leads and from the events that occur during his tenure. For Salinger's audience the fruit of this invention is a release. To understand the Presidency as powerless whenever decent is to banish the idea of responsibility and wash everyman's hand of the Whole Thing. If authority cannot be virtuous, or if virtue become a head of state can only turn on the nation and chide it for its actions, then chaos and corruption are natural laws, and no individual citizen needs to concern himself with the national events

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that occur in his lifetime. But for the writer there is a release of a different order—release from the wearing pressure of belief that the chatterers, the figures of apparent strength (whether "great orators" or bathroom barkers) in truth possess any power whatever. I, the mute but revealed Honest Seymour-Abe, started nothing, managed nothing, finished nothing: things happened "out there," stupidity in the mass drove them on, authority was never more than helpless, there are no men at the top. The writer asserts through his hero that if he as writer cannot be competent and responsible, if he as writer cannot be a man of power, then power does not exist: the word-mongering false elite should admit its futility and subside.

Inherent in this logic is an ideal of political virtue impossible enough, perhaps, to be described as religious. But examination of the conflicts elsewhere in Salinger's fiction indicates that the writer's vision of honesty stems only in part from torment about the gap between reality and the ideal. Its ultimate spring may well be *ressentiment* itself, a motive of revenge—a will to strike back at the non-writers of the immediate circle, and through them at doltish pseudo-leaderly millions of others who, sure of their own tongue, have dismissed the literary imagination as a superfluity.

Parallels to the situations and conflicts just discussed can be located in a great number of contemporary writers—but a multiplication of instances would be evasive. And the same can be said of efforts to decide whether wordbaiting is one more special "sickness" of the age.[2] The plain case is that not for a century or more has adoption of a "healthy" attitude toward language been a living alternative for literary man. The modern writer who damns the word, the modern technician or scientist who trusts it "within limits," are both conditioned by general history and by the history of literacy itself. For the technician, a man without precedents

[2] For the record it may as well be noted, though, that freedom from voices that talk judgmentally back out of the air is a deep longing of the paranoiac; the latter uses his own speech as a means of silencing other speakers whose words threaten his being. In the chapters on the madness of D. P. Schreber which conclude his *Crowds and Power* Elias Canetti has a valuable commentary on the subject. Culling evidence from the memoirs of Schreber, who was Senatspräsident of the Dresden Court of Appeals until his illness, Canetti observes that "the thing most important to [this madman] was the safety of words. To him all sounds were voices, the universe was full of words: railways, birds and paddle-steamers spoke. When he was not uttering words himself they immediately came from others. *Between* words there was nothing. The peace he spoke of and longed for would have been a *freedom from words.* But this was not to be found."

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who understands that he has everything to gain, the response cannot be unfavorable. For the writer, a man whose gift can never again be an indisputable mark of command, the response cannot be favorable. The latter isn't alone in his sense of loss; other men of mind in his age are engaged in efforts to recover mastery of language as the defining property of the elite. It is by no means fanciful to hold that most of the new academic enterprises of the humanities in this century—analytical philosophy, linguistics, semantics, the new techniques of literary criticism, the very emergence of literature as a study—owe their inception in part to the desire of the clerk to repossess himself of mystery, to take language out of the public domain, to give just deserts to an age in which everyman believes he owns and understands the word. But solidarity with these inquirers promises nothing to the writer: they too are competitors, violators of literary power. Far from offering him a restorative community, they deepen his depression, sharpen his conviction that silence must be his theme.

It is one thing, however, to grant the inevitability of this theme, the total absence of alternatives (healthy, convalescent, or whatever), and another to stand abashed in its presence. The reader who dismisses the theme of silence as a rare paranoiac infection misreads the past: in the twentieth century there is no way for the writer to meet his need for self-trust save by deprecating the word of others. The reader who argues that the attack upon the word is propelled only by a sensible desire to dramatize scientific discoveries—as, for example, that language is no mirror, and the thingy world is a dream—scores a debater's point (while oversimplifying the relation between art and the history of ideas). But the reader who claims that a novelistic sermon on the inadequacies of language, or a passage of abuse of the Gettysburg Address, or an advertisement of a writer's availability as a candidate for the presidency, is in its pure and single essence a reaction to repressive modern civilization is a sentimentalist. By refusing to allow for the effect of feelings of powerlessness upon any man's attitude toward power, this reader confuses acts of self-interest with acts of self-renunciation.

And there is, to repeat, only one way out of the confusion. The new clichés must earn their keep or lose it in face to face encounter with the contention that their roots lie in narrowly private interest.

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To confront them in the stance of the ready-made convert is to turn mindlessness itself into a value.

The significance of this conclusion can of course be enlarged. For there is at least a possibility that the fury directed at other appurtenances of post-revolutionary civilization besides language may also be subject to analysis as a mode of revenge. Critics who deny this possibility, stoutly maintaining that the ideal reader of modern literature can only be a convert, run no risk of the charge of inhumanity; they prove their openness to literary assault by rising bewildered and disturbed from apocalyptic texts. (The example of Professor Trilling comes to mind.) And the same cannot always be said of those who are eager to shrug off literary damnation of the age: their common conclusion, namely that at the present moment every educated citizen is wiser as well as stupider than the wisest writer, because freer of the past, is too often proclaimed in tones of vulgar triumph.

But rivalries for the crown of Sensibility shouldn't be allowed to obscure the truth that the lesson implicit in the writings of word-baiters does have substantial weight of its own. Accepting the silent saint as a wholly disinterested, self-renouncing redeemer not only means being oblivious to a subtle power grab, a sly act of aggression. It also requires a pretense that alienation never deflects, never embitters, never blinds, the mind that suffers it. And this pretense, whether cruel or generous to those who believe with Seymour-Abe that no one but the writer "*has* to speak," does severe damage to the largest human causes that literature is presumed to serve. "If one starts deploring the inadequacy of language to reality," Sartre once remarked, "one makes oneself an accomplice of the enemy, that is, of propaganda." The struggle to hold free of such complicity is, as the remark implies, a struggle for the survival of means of compelling rulers as well as rhymers to give their open word. Everywhere the century testifies that this struggle is neither abstract nor "existentially" corrupt. Everywhere the century testifies that in its defeat casualties heavier by millions than at Gettysburg go down, poets and proles inseparable in the mass.

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ANNE SEXTON

To Lose the Earth

> To lose the earth you know, for greater knowing; to lose the life you have, for greater life; to leave the friends you loved, for greater loving; to find a land more kind than home, more large than earth. . . . —Thomas Wolfe

The wreckage of Europe or the birth of Africa,
the old palaces, the wallets of the tourists,
The Common Market or the smart cafes,
the boulevards in the graceful evening,
the cliff hangers, the scientists,
and the little shops raising their prices
mean nothing to me.
Each day I think only
of this place, only this place
where the musician works.
He plays his flute in a cave
that a pharaoh built by the sea.
He is blowing on light,
each time for the first time.
His finger covers the mouths of all the sopranos,
each a princess in an exact position.

If you can find it,
the music takes place in a grotto,
a great hole in the earth.
You must wait outside the mouth hole for hours
while the Italian boatman howls the password
and the sea keeps booming and booming.
At that point you will be in a state of terror,
moaning, "How can we?"
for you will see only the unreliable chain
that is meant to drag you in.
It is called *Waiting on the Edge.*

At the moment of entry
your head will be below the gunwales,

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your shoulders will rock and struggle
as you ship hogsheads of water.
"Here?" you will ask,
looking around for your camera and shoes
and then you will not need to ask
for the flutist is playing.
This is the music that you waited for
in the great concert halls,
season after season,
and never found.
It is called *Being Inside*.

It is close to being dead.
Although you had expected pain
there will be no pain,
only that piper, that midwife
with his unforgettable woman's face.
The left side of the flute cannot be seen.
It grows out of the wall like something human.
It is driven into the wall like a pipe
that extends, some say,
into the sun.
The flutist sucks and blows.
He is both a woman
and a man,
abandoned to that great force
and spilling it back out.
He is the undefiled,
the eternal listener
who has cried back into the earth.

In the distance other travelers,
others like you who came out of simple curiosity,
remain for generations.
From all sides of the cave
you will notice the protruding fingernails
of the dead.
From their coffins
as stale as cheap cigars,
through tons of suffocating dirt,

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they heard
and dug down immediately and persistently
They scratched down for centuries
in order to enter.

At the far right,
rising from an underground sea,
his toes curled on a black wave,
stands the dwarf;
his instrument is an extension of his tongue.
He holds it fast
as if it would get away,
wet and cold and slippery as it is.
He is the other half.
The one you hadn't expected.
You will jump up and point at him
shouting, "It is you!"
but he will not listen.
He plays his own song, cursing the wind
with his enormous misshapen mouth.

And you, having heard,
you will never leave.
At the moment of entry
you were fed—
—and then you knew.

Menstruation at Forty

I was thinking of a son.
The womb is not a clock
nor a bell tolling,
but in the eleventh month of its life
I feel the November of the body as well as of the
calendar.
In two days it will be my birthday
and as always the earth is done with its harvest.
This time I hunt for death,

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the night I lean toward,
the night I want.
Well then—
speak of it!
It was in the womb all along.

I was thinking of a son. . . .
You! The never acquired,
the never seeded or unfastened,
you of the genitals I feared,
the stalk and the puppy's breath.
Will I give you my eyes or his?
Will you be the David or the Susan?
(Those two names I picked and listened for.)
Can you be the man your fathers are—
the leg muscles from Michelangelo,
hands from Yugoslavia,
somewhere the peasant, Slavic and determined,
somewhere the survivor, bulging with life—
and could it still be possible,
all this still with Susan's eyes?

All this without you—
two days gone in blood.

I myself will die without baptism,
a third daughter they didn't bother.
My death will come on my name day
What's wrong with the name day?
It's only an angel of the sun.
Woman,
weaving a web over your own,
a thin and tangled poison.
Scorpio,
bad spider—
die!

My death from the wrists,
two name tags,
blood worn like a corsage

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to bloom
one on the left and one on the right—
It's a warm room,
the place of the blood.
Leave the door open on its hinges!

Two days for your death
and two days until mine.

Love! That red disease—
year after year, David, you would make me wild!
David! Susan! David! David!
full and disheveled, hissing into the night,
never growing old,
waiting always for you on the porch . . .
year after year,
my carrot, my cabbage,
I would have possessed you before all women,
calling your name,
calling you mine.

Crossing the Atlantic

We sail out of season into an oyster-gray wind,
over a terrible hardness.
Where Dickens crossed with *mal de mer*
in twenty weeks or twenty days
I cross toward him in five.
Wrapped in robes—
not like Caesar but like liver in bacon—
I rest on the stern
burning my mouth with a wind-hot ash,
watching my ship
bypass the swells
as easily as an old woman reads a palm.
I think, as I look North, that a field of mules
lay down to die.

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The ship is 27 hours out.
I have entered her.
She might be a whale,
sleeping 2000 and ship's company,
the last 40¢ martini
and steel staterooms where night goes on forever.
Being inside them is, I think,
the way one would dig into a star
and forget the word *light*.
I have walked cities,
miles of mole alleys with carpets.
Inside I have been ten girls who speak French.
They languish everywhere like bedsheets.

Oh my Atlantic of the cracked shores,
those blemished gates of Rockport and Boothbay,
those harbor smells like the innards of animals!
Old childish Queen, where did you go,
you bayer at wharfs and Victorian houses?

I have read each page of my mother's voyage.
I have read each page of her mother's voyage.
I have learned their words as they learned Dickens'.
I have swallowed these words like bullets.
But I have forgotten the last guest—terror.
Unlike them, I cannot toss in the cabin

as in childbirth.
Now always leaving me in the West
is the wake,
a ragged bridal veil, unexplained,
seductive, always rushing down the stairs,
never detained, never enough.

The ship goes on
as though nothing else were happening.
Generation after generation,
I go her way.
She will run East, knot by knot, over an old bloodstream,
stripping it clear,

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each hour ripping it, pounding, pounding,
forcing through as through a virgin.
Oh she is so quick!
This dead street never stops!

Imitations of Drowning

Fear
of drowning,
fear of being that alone,
kept me busy making a deal
as if I could buy
my way out of it
and it worked for two years
and all of July.

This August I began to dream of drowning. The dying
went on and on in water as white and clear
as the gin I drink each day at half-past five.
Going down for the last time, the last breath lying,
I grapple with eels like ropes—it's ether, it's queer
and then, at last, it's done. Now the scavengers arrive,
the hard crawlers who come to clean up the ocean floor.
And death, that old butcher, will bother me no more.

I
had never
had this dream before
except twice when my parents
clung to rafts
and sat together for death,
frozen
like lewd photographs.

Who listens to dreams? Only symbols for something—
like money for the analyst or your mother's wig,
the arm I almost lost in the washroom wringer,
following fear to its core, tugging the old string.
But real drowning is for someone else. It's too big

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to put in your mouth on purpose, it puts hot stingers
in your tongue and vomit in your nose as your lungs break.
Tossed like a wet dog by that juggler, you die awake.

Fear,
a motor,
pumps me around and around
until I fade slowly
and the crowd laughs.
I fade out, an old bicycle rider
whose odds are measured
in actuary graphs.

This weekend the papers were black with the new highway
fatalities and in Boston the strangler found another victim
and we were all in Truro drinking beer and writing checks.
The others rode the surf, commanding rafts like sleighs.
I swam—but the tide came in like ten thousand orgasms.
I swam—but the waves were higher than horse's necks.
I was shut up in that closet, until, biting the door,
they dragged me out, dribbling urine on the gritty shore.

Breathe!
And you'll know . . .
an ant in a pot of chocolate,
it boils
and surrounds you.
There is no news in fear
but in the end it's fear
that drowns you.

Two Sons

Where and to whom
you are married I can only guess
in my piecemeal fashion. I grow old on my bitterness.

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On the unique occasion
of your two sudden wedding days
I open some cheap wine, a tin of lobster and mayonnaise.

I sit in an old lady's room
where families used to feast
while the wind blows in like soot from North-north-east.

Both of you monopolized
with no real forwarding address
except for two silly postcards you bothered to send home,

one of them written in grease
as you undid her dress
in Mexico, the other airmailed to Boston from Rome

just before the small ceremony
at The American Church.
Both of you made of my cooking, those suppers of starch

and beef, and with my library,
my medicine, my bath water,
both sinking into small brown pools like muddy otters!

You make a toast for tomorrow
and smash the cup,
letting your false women lap the dish I had to fatten up.

When you come back I'll buy
a wig of yellow hair,
I'll squat in a new red dress; I'll be playing solitaire

on the kitchen floor.
Yes. I'll gather myself in
like cut flowers and ask you how you are and where you've been.

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HERBERT GOLD

A Haitian Gentleman

My first and a coincidental meeting with André-Pierre Vilaire took place on a Panama Lines vessel, steaming southward along the North American coast from New York to Port-au-Prince, just ten years ago. I was bound for Haiti for a year of study in this odd paradox of an Afro-French nation in the Caribbean; he was simply bound home. I watched him pacing the deck, impeccable in a starched white tropical suit, appearing quietly distraught, the lid of control tightly fastened, an elegant tall black man with narrow features and no interest at all in the vague efforts at ship spirit on board the *S.S. Harding*. The other passengers—the ship was about a quarter full—were mainly dependent families of men working in the Canal Zone, so I couldn't blame André-Pierre for his determined abstraction. After he was pointed out to me, I sought an occasion for conversation with him; he was one of the people I had been told to look up in Haiti, and the description I had been given made him seem a curious person. He was the friend of a world-famous harpsichordist whom he had met at school in Paris years before; he was the lover of an actress then popular on the New York stage, and it must have been to see her that he came to New York; he was a prosperous Haitian lawyer; and he had that typical élite Haitian inheritance of divergent ancestry poured onto the African roots—French colonists, a Jewish peddler (grandfather), and a Dutch businessman from Curaçao—so that in his family there were those who sought to pass abroad as exotic Frenchmen and those who, like proud André-Pierre, flaunted their blood and color. To be sure, André-Pierre could not have passed, as one sister did, but also it was not in his nature to try; he even stretched out his long legs in a deck chair as the ship entered tropical waters and seemed to be searching the sky with his closed eyes for a deeper suntan.

He did not invite conversation. He ate alone; he read popular magazines negligently, and then flung them down; he walked incessantly, as if counting for a record number of turns around the deck.

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There was no tranquility in the man, though his striking appearance made one think that such a person should be content to let the world admire him. While the ship bucked and plowed through icy Atlantic waters, he wore dress suitable to New York in winter; on the day the weather broke, and the tropics announced themselves with a humid calm, he began to wear that archaic starched suit which had been crafted for him by his rue du Centre tailor.

Also on that day, as if abruptly feeling at home on the ship, he greeted me cheerily. My problem of how to introduce myself to him was settled by his introducing himself to me. He seemed delighted by my tale of having his name in my notebook—the small-world syndrome; he couldn't place the "mutual acquaintance" who had given me his name, but he was accustomed to being noticed by American women and did not think it odd that a dim stranger should describe him as her friend. He shrugged and turned his hands out. He did not dwell on it. "Mes-z-amis!" he said, "Quelle vie, eh? You do not know what you are finding in Haiti. I warn you, you do not know!"

I told him I had read almost everything in English and much of what was published in French about his native land.

He laughed richly at this. "You do not, do not know, my friend! Cannot possibly!" My pedantry delighted him. When he threw back his head to laugh, he radiated the charm—teeth, grace, open joy, desire to share it—which had led my friend to describe him as "the handsomest man in Haiti, perhaps the handsomest man in the whole world." I pitied her, since he had not even noticed her enough to recall her name; but this indifference to his effect upon others was also a part of his grace.

André-Pierre Vilaire was an atypical member of the Haitian élite, whose traditional business is cultivating lust and indulging pride, whether or not the occasion supports the fantasy. He was a little aloof from women, despite his famous love affair—or perhaps because of it—and he was barely curious about the ladies who stared after him. He made no lists and catalogues of his conquests, as other Haitians did. What he loved passionately, with a suffering and unrequited ardor, was politics; he had a desperate vision of Haiti, of the possibilities of life in the sovereign republic of Haiti, and frustrated by the succession of corrupt governments over a graceful, miserable people, he could shout and rant like a deceived

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lover. He talked of presidents, generals, colonels, and ministers with despair, with spite, with grinding hatred. With his hand on his heart he quoted "Haiti," by the murdered poet Massillon Coicou:

> Et pourtant elle est riche; et pourtant elle est belle:
> L'océan captive vient baiser ses pieds nus;
> De son plus vif éclat le soleil luit pour elle;
> La nature s'épand dans ses yeux ingénus.

Perhaps Coicou had indeed plotted against a corrupt regime, but have we the right to destroy (he asked me) the heir to Musset?

I answered no as loud as I could, but envied his raging pride. He pleaded the case of la belle Haiti with me as if I were her father; her sky and her sea, her sun and perfume seemed to absorb all the lust in the man; he spoke as if I were familiar with the intrigues of Cap-Haitien and the Capitol. At first this was as strange to my palate as cassava or griots. With the passing days, I began to share his dramatic sense of the quarrels between mulatto and black, between Army and bureaucracy, between peasant and city-dweller, between vodoun and the Roman church, between Francophiles and those who believed that American technique pointed the way to the future, among the admirers of Mexico and Jamaica and even the isolated circles of Marxists. These desperate struggles took on an intimate, playacting quality, since the élite class was so small that André-Pierre had relatives in almost all camps. He wanted to shoot his cousin. He had once been forcibly entertained for a weekend in the dreaded Fort Dimanche prison, of which another cousin was the commandant. He had a nephew in the cabinet and was convinced that the current government, that of the most illustrious General Paul Magloire, would again imprison and perhaps torture him.

Sometimes, however, he relaxed briefly and other matters could occupy our turns about the deck. He talked about his student days in Paris, when he had fallen in love with the daughter of the mayor of Marseilles; he had taken a doctor of laws degree. He believed Anglo-American jurisprudence to be more humane than the Napoleonic Code. The judge—the juge d'instruction—begins his investigation with the clear dream of revenge. This necessarily corrupts; it allows too much to the human; it gives privileges to passion, and passion in authority is the enemy of justice. ("They

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shot Massillon Coicou! They crucified Charlemagne Peralte! The best of us have been immolated!") He paced, he put his hands behind his back, he calmed himself before four o'clock tea on the deck. "I am the victim of my history—agreed? Mes-z-amis!" He shrugged and accepted his history, eager to change only the future.

I tried to lead him to talk about his plump Marseillaise, but he was uninterested in sex, it seemed, and uninterested in the handicap of his color. In the circles in which he moved abroad, he was more special for his good looks than for his espresso color, and both bored him. He never discussed the actress, other than once to remark that he had a friend in New York—"I am a man sometimes, am I not?" After knowing other Haitians, his refusal to gloat over prowess and success came to seem a miracle. He was unique in this and in other ways.

And then suddenly one morning we lay at anchor in the sweltering harbor of Port-au-Prince, the ship pointed into the long low curving line of the shore, tiers of city rising into misty hills toward Pétionville, Kenscoff, and the faraway pine forests of Furcy, and the cathedral sticking out of one tier with its candy colors, and a confusion of customs and police and naked boys in hollow-log canoes, screaming at us to throw coins into the bay. I stood with André-Pierre and watched the flashing bodies cleave the water, come up gasping, the coin grasped between teeth, and then tucked into the cheek for another plea, "Aie! Aie! You! American! Encore! Encore!"

"My daughters will be here. You will stay longer in douane. My son will come with the pickup and take you to your hotel."

Abstracted with his homecoming, André-Pierre eased my arrival in Haiti, and then excused himself. Of course he had much to do. Later we would take up our friendship again, continuing that shipboard good luck of intimacy which is often established but seldom sustained in the "real life" of land and habit.

My image of André-Pierre, from what I knew of him and from his manner on board ship, was of a very rich man, living elegantly, with aloof and indulgent manners toward his wife, children, and servants. He played tennis. He liked to lock himself in his den and build shortwave radios. But my conception was wrong. His house in the Canapé-Vert section of Port-au-Prince was modest and undistinguished; his Syrian wife suffered from his snappish

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temper, as did the servants; he indulged his two daughters and two sons, but also they got on his nerves. He would give them candy and tell them he had a headache. When he was nervous, he sniffed from a benzydrine inhaler. He had allergies—to bougainvillea? burning charcoal? bananas? to which of the many fervent smokes and smells of Port-au-Prince? Once I saw him dance the meringue, and that only for a few moments to entertain a foreign visitor, and never again. "Frivolity! This people destroys itself!" He had given up dancing, he said, as a protest against the corruption of Haitian life; in any case, it bored him. Sometimes he would go with friends to the Choucoune, where the blare of the orchestra eliminated all but the thought of the meringue or the mambo and the girls, and he would smile and nod; his friends received his smile, his mirthless laughter, his self-deprecating discontent; he would not dance; he was there only to confirm what he already knew. "Mes-z-amis!" he cried, laughing with chagrin for Haiti, "in such a world to dance?" And then he would tell me how President Stenio Vincent—or was it Lescot?—had stolen the bounty paid by Trujillo for the 14,000 Haitians slaughtered in a senseless pogrom.

My early sense of a man exotically endowed by fortune gave place to pity, even to irritation; but in that familiar way, even his weaknesses contributed to our friendship. He snapped at his dowdy Syrian wife. He listened impatiently to the prattle of his daughters, and his sons sulked and avoided him. His law practice dwindled and there was less money for his trips abroad. He never mentioned the famous actress. Finally, in an access of gossipaceous curiosity—in Port-au-Prince sex and politics were the consuming passions of the few who had enough to eat—I brought up the subject. André-Pierre listened pensively, with a bruised thoughtfulness. "You know of her?" he asked. "Hm. Yes. Well, you know, my friend, at my age—"

"You're young yet." (He was forty-eight, with gray flecking the short curly hair which softened the angular planes of his skull.)

"But in this difficult life, nos tristes tropiques. . . . So you've thought about her all this time? You've been curious all this time? Mes-z-amis!" He laughed softly. "Sometimes you seem so young, like all Americans."

Sometimes André-Pierre seemed very young to me, open to the world like an adolescent in his bruised idealism. Each new abuse

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of power by the Magloire government outraged him afresh; he collected dossiers on grafters, cheaters, and trimmers; he invited fellow dissidents to his house, all of them risking a beating, imprisonment, or worse. They knew it; their meetings had little point other than to declare to each other their opposition; they knew it and they met anyway. Since most business was connected with the government, which was supported mainly by aid from the United States, André-Pierre lay under a financial interdiction. He had few clients. He was slipping down; he could not afford to spend. But sin made him howl, and this howling gave him something like joy, and it cost nothing but the danger.

An incident typical of the Haitian toy politics of the time took place about one of these clandestine meetings in André-Pierre's house. Word of the gathering had gotten to the police, and André-Pierre knew that word had gotten to the police. To persist seemed a suicidal folly. His friends decided to hold their illegal meeting anyway. They would be arrested and take the consequences.

That week I had a friend visiting me from the States. He was an oral surgeon, familiar with the mouth and jaw, but unfamiliar with the dreamy games of Haiti. I decided to give him a lesson. We drove his rented car to Canapé-Vert to watch the police raid. We stood in the street, waiting for trucks and sirens. This was adventure aplenty for a seventeen-day vacation; the cops would be carrying submachine guns. Within a stone-hot afternoon, with dogs barking and cocks crowing and donkeys crunching the grass, and the skinny black Haitian pigs darting and foraging in the ditches, and the shoeshine boys clacking and the sellers of lottery tickets shouting their lucky numbers—amid all the ceaseless animal teeming of Port-au-Prince—we stood at the corner and waited as the half-dozen conspirators entered André-Pierre's house. They peeked over their shoulders and dodged inside. We were watching dead men in tan suits, in starched white suits from the tailor on the rue du Centre, with briefcases, smiling. They were men who had no need to imagine their own death—they were stepping forward to welcome it.

My friend and I loitered. We felt blindingly Caucasian on that nameless street in Canapé-Vert.

Twenty minutes later we heard motors. The police roared up in black Buicks. They sprang out, and then the major in charge caught sight of me and my oral surgeon friend. The oral surgeon

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was a stranger in town. To the major he was not an oral surgeon—he must have seemed a dangerous, lounging creature. Could the American embassy or the FBI or the Secret Service or the OSS or the CIA be interested in this case? Why were we watching? Who were we? There was an abrupt halt and a council among the raiding police. They peeked at us as we stood gossiping together in our Keds.

What if they made a mistake?

What if it turned out badly?

Internationally?

My friend blew his nose in a Kleenex—was that a signal to Foster Dulles? To Edgar Hoover?

The police decided to take no chances. Because of our presence on that corner, they piled back into their automobiles and drove away. An oral surgeon and a student had become factors in Haitian political maneuvering.

For André-Pierre the incident again demonstrated the absolute inferiority of Haitian political life. He seemed to regret being spared. After all, to be arrested was only an inconvenience. In those amiable days of the middle nineteen fifties, the murder of political prisoners was not yet very common. Haitian coffee commanded a high price on the market, and more important, the one known Haitian communist commanded a lot of anti-communist dollars in aid from the United States. The government was corrupt, but the people were optimistic. There were enough beans, enough rice, plenty of mangoes and bananas. The songs about the sun of Haiti and the pneumatic Creole maidens and the joys of Carnival, rara, and bamboche seemed more real than the grinding habitual poverty of Haiti's uncounted, unconsidered millions of peasants. "We could tell the truth," said André-Pierre, "except that things are real to us. We get hungry, we want things, we can't tell the truth."

2

André-Pierre was bored by vodoun, as a southern planter might be bored by hillbilly music. The loas of vodoun, and the bakas and loups-garou and zombies—the beasts of the Haitian hills—he had put away years ago, along with his childhood. If others believed, then others were foolish. "I have a degree from Paris, do you think I need to spend time on chicken-worship?" This sounded

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snobbish to me; I was fascinated by an exotic religion, folklore, and language; but on the other hand, hillbilly songs found me a snob in the Army. André-Pierre had grown up surrounded by sounds of the drums in the hills around Port-au-Prince, and ceremonies often blocked the road when he had business elsewhere.

Once he had business in the dying provincial town of Saint-Marc and I drove there with him, over a pitted road, through miles of barren mountains and gray sisal plantations, sometimes descending toward the blue and white waters of the bay which washes that island. In Saint-Marc itself, the ruins of colonial architecture, thick walls and abutments, were surrounded by huts of mud and straw; the remaining coffee was loaded onto decaying docks, into iron-sheet sheds; sleepy peasants and a few sun-struck, white-suited old men wandered the seaside square. I saw one gentleman in a starched white suit, carrying a coco-macaque, the knobbed stick of the bourgeois, beating his way with tiny, arthritic steps across the street to the custom house. "Why does he dress like that?" I asked. He wore a high celluloid collar and button shoes. It was sixty years ago by his costume.

"He sees no reason to change his habits," André-Pierre said.

"It couldn't have been very comfortable when lots of people had those habits."

"They dressed like that in Madagascar, Martinique, Guadalupe —in the French colonies."

"But Haiti has been independent for a hundred and fifty years."

André-Pierre then smiled as if his next remark answered all my objections. "It's my first cousin." He honked the horn and stopped the old man. He shook his hand in formal greeting. When I was introduced and took his hand, I felt the soft and womanly hand of a man who had lived in Saint-Marc all his life and not yet done very much work. He did not take us to his house. He lived on pride; his starched clothes were his home, and he slept in what was little more than a hut. "Haitians are like that," André-Pierre said of him, said of many. "We are crazy—agreed?"

My friend's cousin would continue until the end of his term on earth taking his daily walk on vague business across the central square of Saint-Marc, expecting deference from the peasants and soldiers who thronged the square, carrying bills, passes, receipts, orders, little slips of paper, and living on a few dollars a month—the rent of his land, the transfer of a few bags of coffee. He knew

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the town was dying; but he also knew he himself was dying, and he and the town awaited their fate together.

In Cap-Haitien, Jacmel, Jérémie, and Saint-Marc, my friend had relatives, or relatives of relatives, who lived like this. Once flourishing provincial centers, now the tramp ships only occasionally stopped in these places, unloading a few cases of Dutch chocolate, kerosene for the lamps, candles and medicine and mail. In Port-de-Paix, the one town of size where my friend knew no one, I was nearly the first foreigner to visit since a woman anthropologist nearly ten years earlier. But when the mayor asked whom I knew in Port-au-Prince and I named André-Pierre Vilaire, he said, "Oh yes! My wife's cousin is married to his niece!" And we played chess by flaring lamplight through a long evening which ended, I think, with my getting bitten by the mosquito that gave me malaria.

During the French colonial times, wealth poured through these ports along the crumpled shoreline of Haiti. In André-Pierre's youth, fortunes were still made by landholders. In 1954 there would still be a Café des Poètes or an Au Bon Boisson where, among a display of coconuts and dusty bottles, the old men might gather at dusk to drink their coffee by candlelight and discuss the future of Russia, the United States, Haiti, and Jérémie. A cousin to André-Pierre informed me that Haiti would be the third force to mediate among the other two great powers. But first, he said in this town without electricity, without sanitation, inhabited by illiterate and half-naked peasants and a few spirit-wounded Francophiles like himself, Jérémie would die. It would be killed by the predators of Port-au-Prince. He raised his fist and shook it in the dim air of six o'clock. Cursed Port-au-Prince! Jérémie la douce, as all the world knows. He ordered more coffee for both of us, and candles. As I met the friends and relatives of my friend throughout Haiti, I felt that I knew André-Pierre better. Kindness and courtesy and the deepest isolation.

On the drive back from Saint-Marc, he honked furiously at a vodoun funeral procession on the road. The mourners scampered and dodged, carrying the coffin zigzag as they ran, in order to keep the evil spirits from invading the body. Only evil spirits travel in a straight line.

"Fools. Idiots. Poor deprived people," said my friend. "Evil can move in as crooked a line as you and I."

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3

When my mother visited Haiti, I expected the response of bewilderment. She had a conventional mistrust of negroes, based on the habits of Cleveland, Ohio. ("Don't drive through Woodland Avenue unless you lock your doors, they'll jump on the runningboard.") But I underestimated her empirical character. She was charmed by André-Pierre; she was too old and too married to allow herself to fall in love, but she turned a bit girlish in his presence. Patiently he explained Haiti to her, controlling his exclamations of chagrin before the iniquities of the government, and later explained to me his affection for her: "My own mother, Christ rest her soul, was half-Jewish. She was a black nigger, but she had a nose—look at mine and see the shadow of it." He apologized for smoking in my mother's presence. She advised him not to use the nasal inhaler because it would not be good for his passages. They discussed, knee-to-knee in deep mahogany and wicker furniture, and saw eye-to-eye in some mysterious way.

André-Pierre poured himself into generous good-feeling with my mother; his striking appearance was a mere happenstance of his character; he did not depend on it. Sex occupied a trivial place in his life. Most Haitians had as many women as they could afford —a wife, one or several placées (semi-official wives, whose children were often recognized by the father), plus mistresses, occasional unfocussed affairs, drunken mountings. Their pride lay in possession, and unsanctioned possession was a demonstration of freedom. André-Pierre dwelled in his fierce dreaming against the government, his friendships, and little more. His pride was in being right. "New-York, c'est fini," he once told me. The word "New-York" meant that famous actress; I envisioned a devouring love affair occasioned by sacrifice and passion and a dream of perfect attainment. Now he understood that there was no perfect attainment.

My mother kissed André-Pierre goodbye at the airport when he surprised her by appearing to see her off. "He's not the kind who'll jump on your runningboard, is he?" I asked.

"Hanh?" she said, oblivous to the indoctrinations of my childhood. "He's such a beautiful man—I mean he came to the airport to say goodbye!"

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4

During the nine years since I left Haiti, my mother has asked me every time I see her, "Have you heard from Andrew Peters?" I did hear from him at first, with the following messages: One daughter was married. Then a son was married. And all the time, the situation grew worse. In veiled ways, in case his letter was opened, he wrote with the intention of a drowning man: *help!* He reported Roman Catholic marriages for all his children—to please his wife, to please them. "I attended," he noted ironically, as if he had a choice in the matter. Once he telephoned me from New York, but I was then living in San Francisco. It was the only time he visited the States during that period; earlier his habit had been to make the trip every six months. Money was becoming extinct.

During the past few years of the Duvalier regime in Haiti, I heard from André-Pierre not at all. My notes were unanswered. Was he alive? He would now be in his late fifties. Would he still have that graceful tread when he walked, that lean power in his gaze? And would he survive?

When the chance to revisit Haiti came, I was afraid of the news. Bad times lay heavy on Port-au-Prince—danger, morose suspicion, gusts of terror. Since the telephone system no longer operates, the only way to make contact with someone is to go seek him out. I directed the cab driver to his office, "près maison Morisseau," and found it boarded up. He no longer had an office in town.

It took me three days to find him. Most of his family were either dead or in exile. Almost by accident, I heard that he lived alone in a small house up the mountain in Pétionville, that he had suffered serious trouble with the government, that he had been imprisoned and hurt in an abominable way. The man who knew where he lived said with a grin: "He is obliged to be a philosopher one hundred per cent. Nor more jigajig." This man was a tonton macoute, a member of the private militia of the ruling dictator, François Duvalier, who called them his "bogeymen" and let them roam the nation, administering the terror. He wore a pistol stuck in his belt. It pleased this macoute to hint at the injury done Monsieur Vilaire.

When I found him, in the makeshift house in a courtyard where

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he lived, almost his first words sounded an echo of the tonton macoute who had snickered about the change in him. "Eh! Mes-z-amis!" he cried, stepping toward me in the doorway with delight, but not with astonishment, as if it had been nine hours and not nine years since last we had met. Then he put his arms around me and leaned back, squinting and grinning, as we performed that ritual mutual inspection of the damage and gain given by nearly a decade. Well, he was older, the tight skull a little less precise in its lines, the close hair nearly white now, but not really so very much changed except for a brutal scar at the side of his head, crossing just at the long line of his left eye. It looked as if he had been hit a glancing blow by a coco-macaque. "Oh!" he said. "They nearly expropriated my eye. It was infected, but you know my African blood, I thrive on disease. It healed without a doctor seeing it."

He looked proud and then he shrugged. "Well!"

He was in a bathrobe. He wanted to dress for me, but I begged him not to move. When I found him, he had been eating rice and beans out of a bowl. On the table along with his lunch were bottles with Spanish labels on them—drugs from the Dominican Republic for indigestion, for calming, for stimulating. With a delighted smile he told me that he now lived alone in this "baraque;" his entire family was in the States, wife and children and in-laws. "But they won't give me my passport. They let me out of Fort Dimanche, but they're still afraid of me," he said. When he stood up again, I saw that he was as tall as ever, though with the soft weight added to his spare frame, the soft flesh flowing, he seemed less towering.

In ten minutes he told me his story. He had been held for five months in prison by the Duvalier militia. He told me with a smile. He had been brutalized, beaten, disgraced in the imaginative ways invented by a people slow to violence, but with violence deep in their nature, as it is in the nature of all peoples. He showed his teeth delightedly as he explained what was happening to Haiti. Upon his release from prison—his eye had been damaged slightly, he had been forced to eat abominations and his stomach had been ruined, his manhood had been damaged—he went straight back to his conversations with the opposition, his sedition, his rebellion, as if nothing had changed. "Ah mais oui! Now I must be a philos-

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opher. But of course I cannot travel anyway. And no money. Listen, this country is beyond disaster, my friend. Listen, we know grief now, grief pure and abstract. Listen,"—and I listened as he described the regime of a ruler mystically devoted to control of the apparatus of the state without any rational aim. The continuation of control by means of terror and grief meant a thousand instances of corruption, hatred, torture, and murder. Even the famous gaiety of the Haitian countryside was in ruins. Any stranger, even any friend could be a secret macoute.

The afternoon passed as he spent his pity upon this suffering nation. Then abruptly he paused and thought of his visitor. He gazed at me, confused suddenly by the time that had fled. "Are you happy, my friend? And you? Are you happy?"

"Pierrot, how can you ask that? What a question!"

"Ask *me,*" he commanded.

"What do you mean?"

"Ask it me!"

His skin had a grayish tone under the espresso brown. "How do you feel?" I asked.

"That's not the question—agreed?"

"You can't enjoy being a martyr. Are you accomplishing nothing, Pierrot? What are you after?"

"My daughters are lovely. They became lovely girls. You knew them when they were awkward, but now they are lovely. They both live on the West 92nd Street near Riverside Drive."

"I'll see them when I'm in New York."

"But ask me! Ask me the question!"

Amid the desolation of that house of concrete blocks, with its debris of equipment, shortwave radio and inoperative telephone, photographs and piled-up magazines, bare bulbs hanging and disconnected refrigerator and a mess of half-naked children playing in the compound outside, I gave him his question: "Are you happy, Pierrot?"

He stood up with the tail of his bathrobe flapping. "Haiti has no future! I have said it and said it a thousand, thousand times! Now everyone sees the proof. We can no longer save ourselves. The power is gone. The sky is falling about our heads." He paused for a moment and flashed his delighted grin. "To your question: *Yes.*"

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W. D. SNODGRASS

Edmund to Gloucester

That you are blind, I always had admitted;
Got diddled gladly in one game or another.
If you are led about by that half-witted
Competence, my legitimate half-brother,

That's nothing new. The sweet cunt of virtue,
That was you. Obscurity was your vice,
And who's to say your blindness ever hurt you
Much? For a man who had no use for eyes,

You made out. They tell me you called my name
In pain. The same name you gave me. I knew
No word for you. Nor you. Holding no claim,
I kept my breath. I never called to you,

Not even now when every farmer's dog
Wails your wet track. You?—oh, you'll lose our spies
As you lost me. Dark, tender as a fog,
You would dissolve in considerate soft lies,

Shadowy and plausible as a ghost,
Until I could pass through you like the air
I breathe. I breathed you in, each breath, yet lost
Touch, could not touch you, hold you, anywhere.

Today, we touched you. So I accept your title,
Your legacy. You may go. If I go free
To pogue this bitched world, I ask no requital.
At least, you will not need to look at me.

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MAY SWENSON

The Watch

When I
took my
watch to the watchfixer I
felt privileged but also pained to watch the operation. He
had long fingernails and a voluntary squint. He
fixed a magnifying cup over his
squint eye. He
undressed my
watch. I
watched him
split her
in three layers and lay her
middle—a quivering viscera—in a circle on a little plinth. He
shoved shirtsleeves up and leaned like an ogre over my
naked watch. With critical pincers he
poked and stirred. He
lifted out little private things with a magnet too tiny for me
to watch almost. "Watch out!" I
almost said. His
eye watched, enlarged, the secrets of my
watch, and I
watched anxiously. Because what if he
touched her
ticker too rough, and she
gave up the ghost out of pure fright? Or put her
things back backwards so she'd
run backwards after this? Or he
might lose a minuscule part, connected to her
exquisite heart, and mix her
up, instead of fix her.

And all the time,
all the time-
pieces on the walls, on the shelves, told the time,
told the time
in swishes and ticks,

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swishes and ticks,
and seemed to be gloating, as they watched and told. I
felt faint, I
was about to lose my
breath—my
ticker going lickety-split—when watchfixer clipped her
three slices together with a gleam and two flicks of his
tools like chopsticks. He
spat out his
eye, lifted her
high, gave her
a twist, set her
hands right, and laid her
little face, quite as usual, in its place on my
wrist.

The Lightning

The lightning waked me. It slid unde r
my eyelid. A black book flipped ope n
to an illuminated page. Then insta ntly
shut. Words of destiny were being ut-
tered in the distance. If only I could
make them out. . . . Next day as I lay
in the sun, a symbol for concei ving the
universe was scratched on my e yeball.
But quickly its point eclipse d, and
softened, in the scabbard of my brain.

My cat speaks one word. F our vowels
and a consonant. He rece ives with the
hairs of his body the wh ispers of the
stars. The kinglet spe aks by flashing
into view a ruby feath er on his head.
He is held by a threa d to the eye of the
sun, and cannot fall into error. Any
flower is a perfect ear. Or else it is
a thousand lips. . . . When will I grope my
way clear of the entrails of intellect?

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DONALD RICHIE

Notes on the Noh

The Text

IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE to read the Noh as literature, but it is difficult. It requires the kind of imagination essential to anyone who sits in complete silence and reads a score. It also requires a like amount of skill—whether the text is translated or not. Going to the Noh in Japan is very like going to a chamber music recital elsewhere. Many have the text open in their laps. Since the language is so obscure, the delivery so slow, the syllables so drawn-out, most Japanese could not otherwise understand a word. Even with the text, as with the score of a Schoenberg quartet, one must study it both before and after performance for the subtleties to become apparent. The pleasure lies in comprehending the form, in discovering the retrogrades, in uncovering the canons; or in tracing the allusion, in understanding the ambiguity, in finding the richness of the associations. The text of Noh is a collection of poems, some by the author of the play, some not; it is a repository of popular songs of the day; language and often action turn on the pun, the *pillow-word, the invented portmanteau, pivot-words, conceits.* Reading Noh is like reading late Joyce, like reading St. John Perse, like reading Webern. Each note, each word must be savored, weighed, calculated, and then put again into context; the context and never the word alone creating the image. Noh defies translation, as Chinese poetry, as Donne defy translation. Properly, Noh should include two pages of commentary for every two lines of text. When Hagoromo dances for her robe and sings of the heavens, she does much more than just this. What we are given is a created cosmography in which float bits of T'ang poetry, pieces of earlier Japanese, traditional refrains, and transient songs of the day. The language turns, convolutes, rears back upon itself. A near approach is Middleton, Webster, Ford; or, in Shakespeare, the echoing poetry of *Measure for Measure,* the subjective rant, all association, of Thersites in *Troilus.* The language of Noh is like music of the Elizabethan period, like the parade of reminis-

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cences—controlled but seeming not—in the *Cries of London;* like the drinking-rounds and canons, cunning and lapidary. The Noh is mannerist drama.

The Images

The text of Noh is concerned with the drama itself, with its description. Since bare action is as important to Noh as the bare stage, there are no jeweled stanzas, no encrusted couplets. A line may have five ambiguities but will contain not one metaphor. Instead, the scene is laid by adjectives, strings of adjectives, and we recognize the style—it is that of Greek poetry. The "autumn-winded pine-tree" and the "wine-dark sea" have a common ancestry. Both are nature poetry. In Noh, natural forces, natural surroundings, nature itself are everything—it is an animistic theatre, the theatre of pure Shinto. Demons come from rocks and ogres from trees, the angel descends from a pine, and the stage is peopled by the dead.

Nature is there not only in the images of language but in other images as well. The backing of the stage is a single great pine, always the same yet always new, as constant as a ground-bass of Purcell but equally varied as the chorus over it embroiders the scene. The costume is always a kimono but such a kimono as never walked the earth. Of indeterminate period, a synthesized garment, it is a landscape within itself. It is pure spider web, rich earth brown and silver skeins; it is autumn incarnate, red, orange, with a touch of dying green; it is a flaming maple tree or the spring's young cherry-blossom. The costume is a vista made animate and each slow turn, each upraised arm, reveal new views. The simple props of Noh—the fan, the rosary, the stool, the travelling hat, the skeleton of boat or temple—are indications. The costumes of the Noh are the images of the play itself. And the talk is of clothes: kimono sleeves get wet, trains trail, clasps open, obis slide; hats, hair, head-dresses, all are reflected in the text itself.

The Performance

The Noh stage is a square raised platform and the audience is at the front and right. Like the reconstructed Elizabethan stage, like the boxing ring, it is a viewing platform. It is the plateau which holds the action, toward which, as though toward a target,

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all attention is directed. This is as it should be because Noh, like the Elizabethan theater and unlike ours, is a theater of action.

To read the Noh is to think of drama; to see it is to think of ballet—and it was those first seeing it who called it the "dance-drama of Japan." The costumes are theatrical in a way we have lost but for the dance; the movements are a ritual the like of which we retain only in ballet. The careful, creeping movements, heel-toe; the sudden wheelings on the stage; the stamps; the sudden fallings on both knees—these we would call dance though what the Noh calls dance is more purely formal, a "number" embedded in the text, accompanied by the chorus, and rendered in English only by the stage direction: "she dances."

And this translation must suffice for that moment when the forces of the play are drawn into a knot, that incandescent moment when words no longer serve, when action must break the history, the story, the plot. The kneeling second actor—a classical fall-guy—has asked all the questions. The standing first—facing the audience, masked, once human but now monster, demon, angel, thing—has answered every one. The final question—and the dance. She—he, it—will now show, will now demonstrate, will now repeat the action, as in that moment in analysis when the patient realizes he must live again, and this time live through, the forgotten, the refused, the evaded experience. At one remove, no longer what she was, faced with the absolute—that peopled world outside the stage—she lifts one foot, then the other, turns, and the final revelation has begun.

The Tempo

A long, drawn-out, hour-long accelerando, ending in the incandescence of dance; a gradual, almost imperceptible movement from molto largo to prestissimo: this is the tempo of the Noh. To try and watch the tempo grow is like trying to watch the hour hand of the clock move, like trying to watch flowers open. Yet there are seconds when you realize that before your eyes this tempo has changed. It seems faster, you think. It really does. Then: It *is* faster. Then: No, it is faster than I had thought. Midway through most plays the tempo catches you, and what had seemed a uniform (dignified, serene, moving, leaden, dull, boring) flow is now revealed—after it is accomplished—as an incredibly subtle meta-

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morphosis from dead stop to as fast as possible. And, at the height, somewhere past the middle of the play, comes the dance, the roaring, swooping, pounding, crushing dance of the demon or the ogre, the ecstasies of the mad ghost, nature for the first time appearing as typhoon, as earthquake, as terror and conflagration; or the quick dance of sorrow or bereavement, the dance of the dead, the spirit, the mad.

Structure

And this dance, the heart of danced Noh, occurs—when it occurs —always and precisely at the moment when truth is recognized, when shame is thrown off, when the first actor finally appears as he really is.

The opening of the Noh is on the level of our theatre, it is slower but it is naturalistic. We are in a mountain pass, or in a forest, or by a sea-shore. The second actor—as truly our representative as ever was audience in *Knight of the Burning Pestle*—comes forward and speaks our language: I am called so-and-so; I come from such-and-such; I am here to tell you a story. Him we recognize; he is one of us. Then out comes a being who looks like one of us but is not. This we know from the mask, from the walk, from the unbelievable beauty of the landscape on his back. This is not one of us and the story of the play tells why. He walks, he talks, he tells his history, or a part of it. Questions are asked. They are partially answered, or they are evaded, or they are cunningly answered, with ambivalence, with double meaning. We circle warily around the truth. We guess but dare not ask.

Then the being disappears (the actor changes robes, into one even more magnificent), we and the second-actor both ponder, or in the old days were at this point distracted by a comic interlude, like the 19th century audience receiving a tidbit, a restorative in the shape of a delicacy by Hümmell between the movements of a grand symphony by Spohr or Cherubini. And the being reappears. It no longer creeps upon the stage. It strides with little steps. It races with almost no movement at all. It looms and swings its arms though its kimono sleeves are still. We are confronted. It was a ghost . . . it was an ogre . . . it was the spirit of a mother searching for her child . . . it was a soldier killed in his prime a hundred, a thousand years before. It is what it is and nothing more. Words fail us, and it—the supernatural—no longer speaks. The dance begins.

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Music

Though the text is written, the music is not. It has been transcribed by patient scholars but this is not the same. The score to the Noh lies in the memory of the performers. It is said to be always the same and, given the Japanese, their reverence, their fear, it probably is—with changes so minute that now one's great-grandfather would be reassured though Zeami find it unrecognizable.

It is a music of such richness and complication as to defy transcription. Like all music of Japan, it is not, however, absolute. It does not and cannot exist by itself. There are no suites from *Shunkan,* no symphonic-fragments from *Kumasaka.* The songs may be abstracted, studied and performed, but only if the text is retained complete. The music exists to punctuate the words. A dry, percussive music, it is extended *secco recitatif,* and musically of no more interest than that. But, in the context of the play, just as dance carries action, so music carries the words. Though at first all seems arbitrary, chaos is vanquished, and form emerges. Amid the taps and clicks of handheld drums, the banging of the floor-drum, the grunts and groans of chorus and musicians, the flute, a single voice that sings throughout, sustains emotion. Its skirlings, over-blowings, filigree, become the dance.

Music is to Noh what Wagner had in mind, but a Wagner unspoiled, without paraphernalia, without *leit-motif,* without those bass cymbals which sound only twice during the four-evening performance. It is very near the world of *Pelléas,* and Debussy's instinct was sound because reading minor Noh is like reading Maeterlinck. Just as the oboe becomes Mélisande, so the Noh flute is the voice of the first-actor when that actor no longer speaks.

The drums thump on, their sound and that of the stamping actor all confused, the sound of earth, the sound of man, the sound of death. And over it, amid the waving and kimonoed arms, like a bird let loose and circling, the flute spirals upward with the dance. It is the voice of the angel, the voice of the demon too. It is the sound of heaven, of any after life; it is the sound of truth disclosed.

The Mask

The costume transfigures; the mask substitutes. Its function is seen in the fact that the second-actor wears none. There is no need.

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He has a face, he is human, he is alive. But not the first-actor; though the opening mask, the mask of the first half, may fool us, it looks so real. As in those moments of emotion when the mask bends down and we seem to see it weep, when the mask turns up and we seem to see it smile. It seems to move, his mask, and counterfeit our nature, but we know which face is real. It is that of the second-actor, who kneels by the side of the pillar and attempts to turn his face into a mask: no smiles, no frowns, his eyes as though painted on his face, his nose a bulge, his mouth a line.

His face is real, but the mask draws us. At first we think of the actor behind it. It must be difficult to see, to breathe; perhaps this is why he moves so slowly. He cannot find his way about the stage. But, just as in the doll theater it is said that the faces of those who hold the puppets soon fade, we no longer see them, they no longer disturb us, so—with Noh—the invisible actor becomes truly invisible—we forget him, the face behind the mask is not remembered, the mystery is not disturbed, we believe in it. And we believe in the mystery precisely because we are *not* shown. The mask is necessary. It is because the second-actor has a face like ours that we do not believe in him. We believe in what we do not recognize. We believe in the mystery.

Rite

Noh drama is a rite and a ritual. But whatever its beginnings, whatever its Shinto derivations, whatever Buddhist associations it may incorporate, it is a rite which is no more esoteric than the rite of listening again to a Mozart quartet, or of rereading Proust. It is repetition which gives dignity and no rite may exist without repetition. This is the rite of the Noh-goer. He goes because he has already gone. He owns the texts; he goes—usually—every Sunday; he is an enthusiast, an *aficionado*. There is no other audience for Noh. Not one out of a thousand Japanese has ever seen it. The average Japanese may know its name just as the average American may know Mozart's, but those who have seen the Noh and those who have heard K. 590 are in a like minority. For this audience the performance is indeed a ritual, a bit more so than our Protestant and a bit less than our Catholic. For them the weekly visit to the Noh is like the weekly opera for those who have bought boxes, the weekly concert for those who subscribe to the Philharmonic,

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except that the pleasure of the Noh enthusiast is more real. There are no social nor peripheral pleasures, no idea of somehow acquiring that patina called culture. The only pleasure is in a contemplation of the Noh itself.

For this reason the Noh has long been in the hands of "amateurs," unofficial artists who keep it alive. The Gagaku is kept by the Imperial Household, the doll-drama is protected by the state, the Kabuki by one of the largest companies in the amusement industry. Noh is "unofficial" in that a few old families perform, as though for their own amusement and enlightenment, and a few people come to the performances. Everyone except the grand masters has some other job, the week-day job, the job that makes the living. On Sunday they have leisure and can do what they like. Thus Noh is like living-room performances in someone's house; it is like the amateur quartet; like the performance in *Mansfield Park*. It is like this and yet it is unlike it in one respect: the performance is not amateur, it is professional with a rigor which few professional performances know.

No one has ever made a mistake on the Noh stage; no one has ever forgotten a line; there are no stumbling entrances, no halting exits. No indulgence is permitted and when an amateur appears on the stage (and the stage every Sunday contains amateurs who were in the audience the week before) the performance is without error. Just as the archery expert who may sell insurance all week long and visit the school once a week never fails to hit the bull's-eye, so the performances of the Noh are devoid of the incompetence which has made "amateur" a bad word in our language. Noh is a dilettante theatre only if the word is correctly understood. Both performance and attendance are based upon love, respect, and enthusiasm. The ritual of the Noh is like the ritual of the party, the picnic, even the weekly card game. But the party is as formal and meaningful as one in Proust; the picnic is of an elegance that makes one think of Watteau; the card game concerns life and death, and devil and angel play together.

The Actor

The actor in Japanese drama is most important. The Kabuki audience goes to see such-and-such with so-and-so *in* it. It is impossible to understand Japanese drama unless one thinks in terms

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of the prima donna, the star, the premiere ballerina. This is less true of Noh than of Kabuki but it holds—not, indeed, that Noh actors are famous or that the Noh audience goes to see a famous actor in a famous role. Rather, and more generally, it is the actor (any actor) who communicates the experience. Noh is one-person drama, it is like a dramatic monologue, a solo pantomime; it is really all soliloquy. This is seen in the formalization of the drama itself.

At first the stage is empty. Then, from a tiny door, the door of a tea-ceremony room, a door through which one must creep as though humbled or chastised, comes the orchestra, followed by the four- or five-man chorus. They enter hurriedly, unostentatiously, making themselves small, like members of the audience arriving late. From the opposite side of the stage comes the second-actor. He is unobtrusive. He is merely observed as already on the veranda leading to the stage: oh yes, here he comes. There, he is already in place, walking, moving, more or less as you and I walk and move.

But the music is building, the actor on the stage moves to a pillar, as though to get out of the way. For the first time we notice the brocade curtain at the end of the veranda. This is where *he* will appear. The curtain is still, the stage is empty of movement. We wait. Nothing happens. The suspense grows, a suspense which only silence and stillness can build. Then, quite suddenly, the curtain is whipped up; it is jerked from behind. This is a real curtain, not the curtain of the proscenium which insists first that real and make-believe be separate, the proscenium later insisting that they be confused. This is a real, magical curtain which does precisely what a drawn curtain should—it reveals.

There stands the masked first-actor. He appears as though in a kind of transformation. First there is nothing. Then, there he is. He is already supernatural. Slowly, very slowly, he makes his way onto the stage and the play begins. At the second appearance—after the "inner" transformation, and the outer kimono change—the curtain is again whipped up and this time the disclosed monster, angel, ghost, swarms upon the veranda and pounds his way upon the stage, again transformed, again new.

It is the first-actor who dances, who moves, who "sings"—if movement and speech may be called song. And behind this being,

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behind this mask, stands the actor controlling the Noh, controlling the audience. Because he is masked, because he is both priest and god, he compels an attention that the merely human never commands. We look at him because we cannot look away. Though his movements may irritate us with their slowness, may infuriate because, initially, they seem aimless, arbitrary, yet meticulous, our eyes return again and again, though unwillingly, to his expressionless face, his mask which mirrors all expression.

He holds us. At the same time, we hold him. Were it not for this mutual rapport, Noh would become a charade in pretty clothes. This is what occurs when the Noh is filmed. To a lesser extent it also occurs when opera or western drama or the Kabuki is filmed. But opera has music, drama has logic, and Kabuki has action. One may enjoy a symphony orchestra without understanding a note of the music—there is so much to look at. But one will not enjoy a live performance of the Bach 'cello suites unless one enjoys Bach. And, even here, there is the music as intermediary between performer and audience. In the Noh there is nothing. There is an ambiguous story, but the text is fragmentary, arbitrary, ambivalent; the music is a part of the stage decor. There exists only that extraordinary bond between the mind of the actor and the minds of his audience. There is nothing else. It is pure and naked theater.

Zeami has something to say about this: "Sometimes spectators of the Noh say that the moments of "no action" are the most enjoyable. This is one of the actor's secret arts. . . . When we examine why such moments . . . are enjoyable, we find that it is due to the underlying spiritual strength of the actor which unremittingly holds the attention. He does not relax when the dancing or singing comes to an end . . . but maintains an unwavering inner strength. This feeling of inner strength will faintly reveal itself and bring enjoyment. . . ." For this reason filmed performances are uninteresting. What was moving becomes quaint, what was enlightening evaporates completely. One does not see a movie as one sees the Noh, and the actor does not perform for a camera as he does for a living audience.

The West has nothing like it unless it be the boxing match where the two fighters exist as naturally as fish in a human sea of roarings, spotlights, shouts and exclamations, held and sustained

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by the sea of humanity of which they are a part, suspended by the thousands of eyes that have made their focal point these two fighting bodies. Between rounds the boxer is dazed, not only because of blows absorbed, but because he has suddenly awakened, because the bond has been snapped, the circuit opened for a minute after three minutes of electrical flow. Two boxers boxing together in a closed room alone would not be boxing, they would not even be able to fight. Likewise, there is no such thing as a Noh rehearsal. There are placing rehearsals for young actors, there are lines to be learned, but there is no performance unless it takes place amid an audience. This bond is the most important fact of Noh and it is toward this that text, music, decor, costume, all work. Not that all are necessary. Noh works in the proscenium theatre. The context is missing but the most important element is there. Just as the violin partitas could conceivably be performed by someone very clever with a comb and a piece of tissue paper, so the essence of Noh remains, that essence which stops time, which makes performer and audience one, which sometimes welds together priest and congregation, which unites the lynching mob. It is this which the actors must first introduce—with the help of the mask, with the entire context of Noh as drama—and then maintain.

Before the actor goes on, he waits in the room on the other side of the brocade curtain. His mask is placed over his face, his costume is arranged, and then he sits before a large full-length mirror, looking at himself. He is preparing. Is he losing himself in the character he imagines?—or is the observing the effect he makes, the better to step outside himself and present it? Both are possible, they are the only possible alternatives. Either he becomes the spirit or else he sees the spirit in his outer form and seeks to present it most effectively. He becomes, or he controls; he loses himself completely, or else so completely controls himself that presentation is possible.

The term "noh" could mean "accomplishment" or "skill" or "talent," and it derives from a verb meaning "to be able" or "to have power." Zeami spoke of the Noh as meaning "elegant imitation" and the music and singing was to "open the ear of the mind" while the dancing was to "open the eyes" of the emotions. "First of all, be a perfect image of the being you are impersonating, then you will also become like him in action," wrote Zeami and "perfect"

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is the most important word here. He speaks of the skin, flesh, and bone of a performance and condemns the actor content with skin alone. When a Noh performance is perfect, it captivates by impressing with a sense of strength coming from the bones, a sense of security from the flesh, and a sense of beauty from the skin. Acting then is "a psychic force which is capable of excellence resulting from a lifelong effort of training and a careful choosing of right from wrong." And, above all, when imitating, "it is important to adjust the act of imitation according to the nature of the thing," which means that the actor must know what the thing is. If an actor tries to show an old man merely by bending his knees and back he is creating an ugly figure, lacking in strength and beauty. The old man is required to flower, and by "flower" Zeami means that something which arouses and captures the interest. This is accomplished by the actor's responding correctly to the state of his audience. If they are anticipating they should be "lightly entertained," but if wandering they should be "startled into receptivity." They must be taken by surprise. One must "bewitch the audience." The actor must maintain that state of balance between himself and the audience, whether he portrays an old man, a woman, or a warrior; and this state is described as being like "a flower blooming on an old tree."

This bond between actors and audience is a bout. The actor returns, after the play is over, exhausted; exhausted in the way a dancer is never exhausted. He has been a god, or else has stood beside and controlled a god. Whichever, he must rest, he must lie down, he must sleep. Like the boxer, he had his first bout with the mirror and, like the boxer, he returns battered, having endured not merely the blows but the consciousness of other wills beating against and finally with his own.

The text is forgotten, the costumes folded, the stage empty, but to those who have seen Noh, to look upon even the empty stage is to remember that naked will, disguised as a god, standing there, demanding and receiving. The experience is religious and, like all religious experiences, it is also aesthetic. Like any sacrificial act, like boxing, like the high mass, it is also cleansing. Though tragedy has not stalked the stage, the effect is catharsis. By becoming one with something not oneself, one is cleansed, made new, and—if only for the moment—made whole.

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JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

THE ORIGIN OF EDWARD ALBEE'S *Tiny Alice* seems to be the old homosexual joke about the identity of God, whose punchline is, "She is black." Since, however, it is no longer safe socially, let alone financially, to be jocular about Negroes, the God of *Tiny Alice* is, outwardly at least, white. But she is a bitch.

It is impossible to outline a plot so complex, elusive, digressive, self-contradictory and, I admit it, imperfectly comprehensible even after two viewings. A summary would err by being too long, too short, or too clear. Most readers will have gathered by now that the play deals with the superhumanly wealthy Miss Alice, her weird castle in which scale models within scale models repeat themselves perhaps to infinity, and her two associates in intrigue, a sinister lawyer and a cynical butler. These three, for an astronomic sum to be paid to the Church, buy from a cardinal his secretary, the simple and pious Brother Julian. It is, to be sure, unclear whether they buy his body, his soul, or his faith; or what good any or all of these commodities are to them, or to the Alice whom they serve. Do they, by humiliations, seduction, and murder, make a fool or a martyr or both out of him? We cannot tell—nor why they leave him, dying, to an invisible Alice who may or may not exist.

It has been contended that *Tiny Alice* is based on Manichaeanism, or on Genet's notions of evil being good, and good evil. Accordingly, Alice may be God, or the devil, or both in one; she may also be anything one wants her to be (the lawyer explains that we do not get what we want but want what we get); or she may not be at all. Julian may be Everyman, Christ (he dies crucified or, at any rate, spread-eagled, crying, "Alice—God, why hast thou forsaken me?"), Julian the Apostate (he spent six years in an asylum when he lost his faith; when he marries Miss Alice, Alice's tiny earthly representative, he forsakes his lay brotherhood), the Holy Ghost or Joseph (in the asylum, he may have had—unless he hallucinated it—intercourse with a patient who claimed to be the Virgin Mary; now he becomes Alice's consort); or he may be any martyr for his faith, with all that implies of heroism or folly or both.

Nor is it clear whether Julian finally triumphs or fails, though his end seems to be aloneness and annihilation. It is certainly unclear what the three agents spent "two billion" on: humiliating the Catholic Church; supplying almighty Alice, the female Eternal, with men; creating a martyr—yet they would prefer to keep Julian alive, though alone, in the castle; or ridiculing and discrediting martyrdom—yet there is no one there to profit from the lesson.

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The agents may be the World (the worldly, flippant butler), the Flesh (Miss Alice), and the Devil (the vicious lawyer); or they may be devilish angels working for the good, bad or nonexistent deity. But then there are statements by and about them to the effect that they are human, too human—and yet they must go on till the world ends or they are "replaced," whatever that means. The time, place, and duration of the action are left deliberately vague, with contradictory hints about each; the concentric castles, moreover, are supposed to suggest worlds within worlds, each repeating the other. Typically, Albee has already instructed us to enjoy ourselves without trying to understand, but that we can do as well without seeing the play, if not better.

People have discovered allusions in *Tiny Alice* to such far-fetched but not impossible sources as Preston Sturges's *The Lady Eve* and Disney's *Snow White*. There are borrowings from Eliot, Graham Greene, and Pinter in the dramaturgy. Alice, large or tiny, equated once with a mouse imprisoned in the model castle, suggests Carroll's Alice and dormouse. The name Alice may stand for "all is," in the sense that everything or anything can exist, or for its Greek derivation, *alethea,* truth, meaning that such is the supreme truth, God. One can multiply sources, allusions, interpretations, but, demonstrably, none of them fits all parts of the fable.

Tiny Alice fails as symbolism, because of its inconsistency and incredibility on the literal level; and without firm footing in literalness, there is no working metaphor—just as without viable dramatic characters, there are no compelling symbols. But the work fails also as pure fantasy, because it lacks even that homogeneity which lends dreams, hallucinations, and fairy tales their own kind of logic. Why should, when an inexplicable fire breaks out both in the castle's and in the model's chapel, Alice be praying, "Let us not be consumed, oh God!" as well as "Let it all come down, let it all go"? Why God and not Alice? And why should God, or Alice, have sent the fire? And, if we are not to be consumed, why should it all come down? Above all, if we were to follow Albee's jesuitic advice, and merely let the play envelop us and wash over us, how would we cope with the gritty nodules of realism and grating dialectical rugosities that refuse to dissolve in the bath water?

Even hostile critics, however, have joined Albee in admiring his play's language—he went so far as to insist on English actors as alone capable of doing justice to his linguistic demands. Actually, the language leaves much to be desired. Thus Albee uses "replica" for both enlargement and miniature, though it can mean only exact duplication. We are given "removed people" for remote or withdrawn, "quixotic" for perverse or capricious. There is something about being "answerable *to* your own temptations" and about memory being "the same as *it* having happened," and someone announces: "Exit all!" We reach the neighborhood of jibberish with "wonders that may befall

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a man least where he is looking, least that he would have thought." There is also the persistent, supposedly witty or ominous, repetition of one character's phrases by another, until the stage fairly turns into an echo chamber. The subtlety of the word play is exemplified by the frequent and unctuous emphasis on "*lay* brother," or by the lawyer's reference to Julian as "a bird of pray, P-R-A-Y" and his boast of what further puns he could make on this, or by his description of the cardinal, "His Eminence is a most eminent man." Again, the lawyer asks Miss Alice about Julian, "When are you having him again?" and she retorts, "On business or privately?" Worst of all, though, are the sticky attempts at being poetic, in which, for instance, sex becomes "sweet, sweaty slopping," "a milky white gladiator's belly" and "the great, sweet, warm breath of a lion . . . his soft, hard tongue," and so on.

But the awkwardness is not limited to words alone. Some scenes—almost all of act three, in fact—are so attenuated as to float off before our very eyes into nothingness; others, like the conclusion of act two, are crammed so full as to fall resoundingly flat. In the latter, Miss Alice and Julian, back from an outing on horseback, discuss where on a male body hair is sexually desirable (in an earlier scene, we were enlightened about where it is not). Julian is fiddling with his crop, which arouses sado-masochistic yearnings in Miss Alice; he is tempted for a moment, but when he refuses to whip her, she laments, "No one does things naturally any more." He, next, reënacts for her his youthful visions of martyrdom, in which being devoured by a lion in the Roman arena somehow merges with being raped by a gladiator, which, in turn, merges with being penetrated by the lion or, more precisely, his tongue. Miss Alice then seduces Julian in the name of that Alice whose surrogate she is. When she throws open her black negligee to him, Julian goes down on his knees and lunges in. As Miss Alice enfolds him, moaning, "Alice, he will be yours . . . Ah . . . Aaaah . . . Aaaa-liiice," the curtain comes down on the one true mystery of the play: what does Sir John Gielgud do for twenty seconds with his head inside Irene Worth's deshabille? This is wasteful dramaturgy: Albee throws away on one brief scene fetishism, flagellomania, homosexuality, zoophilia, fellatio, cunnilingus, and (though this one is foisted off on the audience rather than on the characters) voyeurism. Now out of all that, Tennessee Williams could have made half a dozen full-length plays.

There is, moreover, a homosexual strain running through *Tiny Alice* but remaining just barely supraliminal and certainly unintegrated; it thus adds considerably to the general confusion. The butler and the lawyer address each other as darling and dearest, there is much hinting about the cardinal's and Julian's being "buddies," the sexuality of the play is largely oral, and there is throughout that suggestive waspishness that characterizes many homosexual relationships. This is particularly evident in the opening scene, in which the lawyer

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and the cardinal engage in a protracted contest of bitchiness laced with references to pederasty past and present, which may yet give rise to a neo-Greek dramatic device to be known as the fagon. Is all this relevant to the main theme or not? Or is it, perhaps, the main theme? Is the whole play a piece of camp metaphysics or metaphysical camping?

A line in *Tiny Alice* about "the same mysteries, the evasions, the perfect plot" describes not only the play but also the stratagems surrounding it and the utterances of Albee and his associates concerning it. The décor is magnificent, but for an evaluation of the staging and the acting, one would have to be a mite clearer about what it all means. Richard Gilman has declared *Tiny Alice* "the most significant play of the season." To me, it appears to be completely non-significant: neither its physical nor its metaphysical world is coherent enough to signify anything. If Gielgud seems at times too theatrical and Miss Worth too portentous, I suspect that the fault, dear Edward, lies not in our stars.

It may be that Albee is the victim of self-delusion and genuinely thinks that he has made a meaningful statement. It seems at least as likely that he is being a *fumiste,* giving vent to his scorn for the great washed. But neither private masturbation nor public provocation is in itself so dramatically adequate that it can dispense with significant form.

Mediocrity and less than mediocrity have been, as usual, living it up on Broadway, having found, as usual, staunch champions in the reviewers or in ad hoc committees of theatrical personalities taking out advertisements in behalf of the plays. Disappointingly, the tone of these paid advertisements proved to be on no higher a level than that of the daily reviews. Such items as *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window, Poor Richard, The Owl and the Pussycat* and *Slow Dance on the Killing Ground* have not lacked enthusiastic support, though, at best, they can claim a few good performances by such gifted young people as Gabriel Dell, Alan Bates, Alan Alda, Carolan Daniels and Clarence Williams III. Probably the most rapturously acclaimed of all these plays is Murray Schisgal's *Luv.* Mr. Schisgal, according to Walter Kerr, domesticates the Theatre of the Absurd on these shores, by taking a more humanely American look at the lives of noisy desperation led by certain purportedly prototypical grotesques in New York City. And whoever likes his Beckett in bobby-sox, his Ionesco on a bagel with lox, may relish this occasionally funny and largely insipid lampoon.

In *Luv* (which here preserves inexplicably a title appropriate to the version Schisgal had put on in London), a now highly successful businessman comes upon the genius of his high-school class trying to jump off a bridge. He has failed at everything and proudly wallows in his monumentally miserable childhood and supercolossal failures thereafter. But his friend competes with him for the possession of the most

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atrocious childhood, and convinces him that LUV is the solution to all problems; he is even eager to let him have his wife who will not give him the divorce he needs to marry another girl. The wife herself presently appears, boasting of a childhood (she hopes) even more horrendous, and a marital sex life—she produces a huge chart to illustrate it—that has long since reached absolute zero. The rest of the play comprises a game of marital chairs, various inept and presumably hilarious attempts at suicide and murder, and a resolution leaving everything exactly as it was before.

What this is, of course, is not devastating social satire, still less avant-garde theatre; it is plain and simple burlesque or vaudeville. (The fact that the avant-garde may also draw on burlesque is irrelevant: you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him a water buffalo thereby.) Indeed, *Luv* might make a perfectly acceptable fifteen or twenty-minute sketch in a jauntier nightclub or revue, but it is by no means a full-length play. The old burlesque device of repetition by way of a slow comic build-up serves a dual purpose here: it stretches out a mere playlet into the more marketable commodity of a play, and it allows the playwright's essentially commonplace mind to revel in its natural habitat. I am not saying that there aren't some genuinely snappy jokes, as when the husband complains to his ex-wife that his current wife has grown a mustache, and the ex-wife tries to be helpful with "You should have given her sympathy, not criticism," to which he retorts, "I should have given her shaving cream." But a large part of the dialogue crawls like this: "I didn't want to marry Harry.—You didn't want to marry Harry?—I didn't want to marry Harry!" Or the gags will be funny in a *passé* and *déclassé* way that makes laughter stick in one's craw: "All I want is you, sweetheart, and the opportunity to be incredibly rich sometime."

One of the troubles is that Schisgal is not quite up to what he is trying to poke fun at. Thus the wife is presented as an overeducated genius, maladjusted because of her unwomanly female superiority. But how does her brilliance manifest itself? In nothing more than a photographic memory and a headful of frozen facts available at a moment's defrosting. Now if the point were that this is what passes for intelligence in our society, Mr. Schisgal would have had at least a tired little idea; but no! he sets this up as a bona fide superiority and then proceeds to debunk it—and what sadder delusion than that of a man who thinks he is pulling out pedestals from under false idols, when, in fact, he is only pulling out the rug from under his own sorry conceits. Significantly, this high-IQ wife says of her husband, "He lays in the corner . . ." Another and more serious trouble is that the playwright scatters his shots in all directions, in an attempt to puncture whatever he can hit, without committing himself to any point of view. And that, in anything but a piece of unpretentious zaniness, is immoral.

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Anne Jackson and Eli Wallach do well enough by their parts, but Alan Arkin is spectacular as the perennial loser. However, even his charms eventually pall, partly because the material stops dead like a too short carpet, leaving Mr. Arkin barefoot on a cold stone floor; partly because a comic technique geared to cabaret skits is not quite sufficient for straight theatre. Still, he and Mike Nichols, the raucously inventive director, emerge as the heroes of the evening. If they work, at times, too frenziedly, it is only out of an instinctive *horror vacui;* yet who but Nature herself could fill the vast vacuum at the heart of this play? Nature, however, is not allowed anywhere near it.

If, on the other hand, you want nature *au naturel,* without the palliative presence of thought or art or narrative or just a shred of restraint—not to mention taste—there is *The Toilet,* the first of two one-acters comprising a double bill by LeRoi Jones. This is a vignette about nine assorted Negro high-school boys beating up a tenth who has made the mistake of sending a love letter to one of them. What adds spice to this triviality is that a) the tenth boy, the victim, is white; b) the locale is the school toilet, allowing for the free flow of scatology and obscenity—something like a third of the dialogue could have been, until recently, identified as "unprintable"; c) the boy who received the love letter is the intellectual type and though he is perfectly happy to help beat the sender to a pulp, he does sneak back later to wash and embrace the bloody and unconscious epistolarian's head.

Now the truth about this bit of vulgarity is that it exploits the Negro-white hostility totally adventitiously and meretriciously, there being no good reason for the particular color scheme of the play; that it raises the equally sensationalistic issue of homosexuality (the white boy defiantly shouts out the content of his letter, an offer of fellatio) without shedding any genuine light on it; that it capitalizes on (forgive the archaism) smut, without even having the sense of using it sparingly for greater effect; that it purports to tell us something about the innermost of life while merely spelling out the inside of a latrine. But the cross section of a toilet, which Larry Rivers's set helps to evoke with full pop-art *verismo,* is not yet the nation in crosscut, which LeRoi Jones so arrogantly pretends, and fails, to represent.

It is typical that Taubman of the *Times,* in his not quite sacred simplicity, should be moved by this alleged parable of love forced by everyday brutality into manifesting itself pathetically on the sly; but I wonder just what higher values are embodied in one high-school boy's offer to take another one in his mouth—regardless of what racial barriers should thus be crossed over or under.

The other Jones play, *The Slave,* is even more offensive. Here the obscenities come less fast, though still pretty thick—"Oh, fuck you, fuck you . . . just fuck you, that's all. Just fuck you! I mean really, just fuck you," runs one of Jones's verbal orchestrations. Far worse is the sheer obtuse nastiness. It is true that this hate-filled piece is sup-

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posedly mitigated by a prologue whose swampy rhetoric seems to be saying that violence is no solution, and by a supposedly high-flown diction. Unfortunately, the pious sentiments and the brackish grandiloquence are both merely stuck onto the surface of the play, and not even with glue but with spittle.

This is a tale of the future in which a Negro leader whose black soldiers are about to take over America enters at gunpoint the home of his white ex-wife, and kills her present white professor husband after reviling him for his intellectualism and alleged repressed homosexuality. He continues to terrorize the woman, who is still desperately attracted to him physically (note that!), and, after one of his bombs blows up the house and mortally wounds her, he reveals that he has just killed their two daughters who had been living with her. Wounded himself, he limps away, after a good day's work of hate and destruction.

Once again, we get here and there a sham gesture of compassion, but the only thing that is real under the bogus language ("sometimes the place and twist of what we are will push and sting, and what the crust of our stance has become will ring in our ears and shatter that piece of our eyes that is never closed") and pretentiously nonsensical ideas ("the worst thing that ever happened to the West was the psychological novel") is the naked, snarling hatred of the author for anything thoughtful, polite, unviolent, or—merely—white. This is the sort of exacerbation of racial conflict that is particularly unjustified and cowardly coming from one who is indulged, lionized, and, above all, produced by whites—whites blinded either by feelings of guilt or by plain stupidity. It is deplorable to see a predominantly white audience (though many of the white women were, characteristically, with Negro men) hysterically cheering this kick in their groins. Mr. Jones calls his play "a fable." If it is that, the only talking animal in it is the author.

It would be pleasant to be able to report that over this desolation we can at least hoist with pride *The Old Glory*, Robert Lowell's three one-acters based on tales of Hawthorne and Melville. Here, once again, we face the almost insuperable problem of adaptation; but, like Lowell's verse translations, these are versions rather than transcriptions, and Lowell, however much of a theatrical tiro, is not the tired hack who usually undertakes to "dramatize the classics." Nevertheless, what comes out is scarcely more viable on the stage than the usual Henry James novel that shows up on Broadway every three or four years.

My Kinsman, Major Molineux was turned by Lowell and his director, Jonathan Miller, into a series of tableaux, in which everything down to the *grisaille* of costumes and make-up imitated eighteenth-century political cartoons. This immediately reduces Hawthorne's nightmare atmosphere to comic garishness. The fact that the hero's solitary wanderings through the nocturnal city become, by dramatic

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requirements, a shuffling about in one place with a kid brother for confidant, further reduces the effectiveness of the original concept. That Lowell has cast it all into absurdist dialogue and stage business, and that Miller directed it accordingly, reduces the horror of reality (heightened reality, if you will) to a string of arch, enervating *frissons*. There is even some claptrap about the ferryman being Charon, and Boston the City of the Dead, which is worthy of little poets' theatres battening on poetic colloquies by women with three names and men with one bad one.

Benito Cereno, on the other hand, tries to shoot Melville full of foresight-like hindsight, by turning it into a parable of the coming racial violence. The point that there is guilt on both sides emerges with some novelty but, in the light of the present situation, little validity. (I doubt that Lowell wishes to play John the Baptist to LeRoi Jones.) Melville's unity of tone and metaphysical speculation is here obtruded on by devices out of Genet's *The Blacks,* previous adaptations of *Billy Budd,* and Hollywood epics of the sea with their shoot-em-up finales. Indeed, Lowell's ending makes the revolted slaves out to be exemplary boobies falling into the most perspicuous trap. The play proceeds at a pace I can describe only as putting one *longueur* before the other, and when everything else fails one can always borrow a scream out of the *Heart of Darkness.* Intelligence is discernible among the pregnant pauses, but it is not yet a dramatic intelligence.

A few special performances of the third play, *Endicott and the Red Cross* were also given, but these did not even benefit by Miller's cleverness. Instead, the production was restaged by Wynn Handman as an oratorio without music. The play has more stasis in it than was packed into the Pyramids, but not nearly so much shape. It does, however, contain the thought that may be the cornerstone of *The Old Glory*: "A statesman can either work with a murderous efficiency and leave a graveyard, or work in a hit-or-miss fashion and leave a cesspool."

For it is Lowell's conceit that "the old glory" of the founding of this republic was more gory than glorious, that no party had a monopoly on guilt; Church of England or Puritans, English or Colonials, white or black—it is only a question of whose foot the shoe is on: the kicks are always coming, with always a behind to receive them. But the point becomes more and more monotonous as Lowell keeps verbalizing instead of dramatizing. The American Place Theatre, however, did nicely by at least two of the plays, giving them a smooth and attractive, though not unblemished, production. Roscoe Lee Brown's Babu and Yehudi Wyner's incidental music were especially noteworthy.

Of the three new Lincoln Center Offerings, one, *The Changeling,* managed to die quickly, the very thing repertory theatre is supposed to protect against. Nothing, however—neither moly nor bathing in dragon's blood—could have prevented the early demise of Elia Kazan's

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misreading and misproduction of this fine play; everything in the production collaborated harmoniously on the creation of total catastrophe. The next item was Arthur Miller's *Incident at Vichy,* which marks a step up from *After the Fall*—but, then, what play would not?

Incident at Vichy concerns some Frenchmen rounded up by the Nazis and awaiting questioning; those who are neither Jews nor Communists will be let go, the others will never again be heard from. The play examines, rather synthetically, the various attitudes of victims and victimizers, and ends with a grand gesture in which an Austrian prince gives his papers to a Jewish psychiatrist and goes to die in his stead. The work is full of pseudo-profundities such as that everyone, even the Jew, has his Jew (i.e., scapegoat), and that what the Jew wants from the gentile is not his guilt but his responsibility. But underneath the catchy phrasing, these are the same doleful, senescent truisms we have had from all the social-commitment wholesalers. The final gesture, which is supposed to be laden with symbolic significance, emerges as a cross between a *beau geste* and an *acte gratuit;* it makes little sense, and proves or promises nothing.

Miller is sincere enough in his grappling with the problems, but just as the events presented never surpass the achievement of the anti-Nazi movies of the forties, the intellectual insight does not even approach the best thinking on the subject achieved in the fifties and sixties. Miller's externals manage to hold our interest, but his essence is merely a tract for former times. Above all, the playwright has no sense of other people in other places: his Jewish Frenchman is patently a lower East-side Jew, his French merchant a Brooklyn shopkeeper, his Austrian aristocrat a pack of clichés, his gypsy nobody at all. And one gets the uncomfortable feeling that the Jewish doctor-hero is a heroic projection of Miller himself, and that the final message is that the world owes the platitudinous homilist a living. Harold Clurman's direction is entirely suitable; among the generally nondescript performances, Hal Holbrook's stands out for its excellence, and David J. Stewart's and David Wayne's for their awfulness.

Translation is the art of losing gracefully. The original is pointed to, accosted, and engaged in an embrace that partakes equally of wrestling and love; but as the good translation goes down before the ultimately unconquerable original, it goes under so gallantly, so generously exalting its conqueror, that the defeat turns into a kind of victory. Such a translation is Richard Wilbur's *Tartuffe,* and *it* is the hero of the evening. Only very, very rarely does a solecism like "how aggravating!" or a cacophony like "They crucify their *foes* in heaven's *cause*" mar an English verse texture as poised, pointed and elegant as Molière could have wished for.

Unfortunately, William Ball, our most talented young director, has not truly succeeded either with his stylization of movement or with his handling of rhyme on stage, and his interpretation of the play is

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less than convincing. The movement consists largely of flouncing promenades by one or two characters, while others, usually whole groups, stand like a troupe of ballet dancers immobilized in mid-action by a cosmic-ray gun. Then, from *tableau vivant* to *tableau vivant,* there is a bit of frantic scrambling to get to the next frozen position in time. It is nice, but it is both too much and not quite enough. And to make rhyme palatable to untutored ears, Ball drives his cast into racing through the lines in the assumption that this will make the rhyming unnoticeable. What actually happens is that the rushing sense slips through our cognition, and we are left with whole earfuls of sound and—precisely—rhyme. Moreover, Ball seems to have taken literally Wilbur's statement that *Tartuffe* is the *Lear* of comedy, and tried for all kinds of wistful and serious moments in the midst of the bustle, which unhappily clash with the nature and movement of the play—as does his interpretation of outrageous comic figures such as Orgon as mere pathetic simpletons. But the earnestness of *Tartuffe* must register in the comedy, in the preposterousness; not from somewhere beside it, and beside its point.

Michael O'Sullivan's Tartuffe is highly implausible: not farce, but travesty of farce—a comic strip with a bad case of the fidgets. This once promising actor is rapidly sinking in a sea of fussiness, affectation, and self-indulgence. There are equally painful and even less interesting performances from Joyce Ebert, Salome Jens, Patricia Roe and Hal Holbrook; Larry Gates and Claude Woolman are at least up to what the director wanted; but Sada Thompson's intelligent, assured, and stylish work as Dorine sets the standard for what might have been. What is, is a clever and by no means contemptible production. But Ball is a brilliant director, and such cleverness is a miscarriage of brilliance no less saddening than any other form of miscarriage.

The musical comedy has come up—or, rather, down—with *Ben Franklin in Paris,* the most graceless musical imaginable; *Bajour,* a close second; and *Golden Boy,* which would be scarcely better except for Donald McKayle's resourceful choreography and Tony Walton's neatly evocative slide projections. But in *Fiddler on the Roof* we are treated to a genuine triumph of the second-rate. I say "second-rate" because Joseph Stein's book dilutes Aleichem's "Tevye" stories, and because Bock and Harnick's music and lyrics are only passable. But Jerome Robbins's dances could not be more communicative and winning, and his direction is (except, oddly enough, at the close of both acts) effective and almost restrained. Zero Mostel's Tevye is, like everything this supreme comedian touches, excessive, but excessive in such a way as to make excess delicious and, miraculously, believable. And, remarkably, the level of acting in nearly all parts is considerably higher than usual in musicals. If the reader of the foregoing should conclude that *Fiddler on the Roof* must be the best piece of theatre around New York today, he will be absolutely right, alas.

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VERNON YOUNG

Some Obiter Dicta on Recent French Films

"New Wave? Old Wave? It's all the same ocean."—Claude Chabrol

THE PRINCIPAL ERROR IN SO MUCH CONFUSED WRITING on the subject of the French "New Wave" is the notion that some twenty-five young directors who have emerged in the past eight years have been going in twenty-five directions, each separate from the other, all radically opposed to the method of any director established before 1958. The assumption will not survive a closer scrutiny. Since the majority of critics (by which I probably mean the jackals who sustain film-festival jargon) would be helpless without the assumption, they can scarcely be expected to challenge it—had they the perception for so doing.[1] What should seem obvious to any filmgoer who is old enough to have a memory is that the similarities between this generation of filmmakers in France and the preceding ones are more numerous than the discrepancies. However exuberant, experimental, informal or even disorderly the new contingent has insisted on being, with whatever degree of seriousness its members have tried out audacities of narration and cutting, it has been working, for the most part, in what might be called the classical tradition of French cinema. This is to say that the new young men have rarely abandoned the intellectual schemata available to them and they have seldom operated outside the milieux of their predecessors. There is a visible link that unites *Le Garçon Sauvage* (1951) and *Les Quatre Cents Coups* (1959), even to the oceanic brink-of-freedom note on which both films end; *Les Cousins* (1959) recalls (as do a score of films, internationally!) Jean Renoir's *Les Règles du Jeu* (1939); *Les Dimanches de Ville d'Avray* ("Sundays and Cybèle," 1962) is reminiscent, poetically, of *Poil de Carotte* (c. 1932); the tone of René Clair, from away back, is implicit in the films of Doniol-Valcroze, Phillipe De Broca or Pierre Kast; *Last Year in Marienbad* is directly traceable to Cocteau's *La Belle et La Bête* (1946), (as well as to Sjoberg's *Miss Julie*), and by way of Cocteau to *The Fall of the House*

[1] John Russell Taylor is no help. His recent book, *Cinema Eye, Cinema Ear* (Hill & Wang, 1964) is a compendium of the leading misinterpretations some of us have been fighting for the last decade—especially on the subjects of Antonioni, Bergman and Luis Buñuel. I had hoped, since his bibliography is almost exclusively French, that he might be informative on a subject for which he clearly hasn't the qualifications for being perceptive. But his chapter on New Wave takes up only Truffaut, Godard and Resnais—obviously a fashionable selection, since he doesn't really *like* Resnais, and his efforts to explain that Godard has anything to contribute, except cheek, involve him in more expostulation than conviction.

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of Usher (1929); and Jacques Demy has explicitly acknowledged (in *Lola,* 1961) his debt to the art of Max Ophuls (Ophuls was Alsatian, trained by Reinhardt, but made his best films in France). To add a Chinese box to this nest, Marcel Ophuls, son of the late master, is also a member of the new dispensation.

The keynote of the "New Wave" is not anarchic, though all efforts to assert artistic individuality are likely to have anarchic features: the movement has been, rather, a spirited reprisal of an abiding continuity and within that continuity few newcomers can be said to have worked alone and unrelated. They have been fully and gratefully aware not only of the precedent over their shoulder but also of each other: they observe each other's films, they deride each other (a form of flattery), they steal from each other, they sometimes vulgarize what they steal, but as often they improve on it. (Factionally, they may be said to sleep with each other; within circles that hail each other in passing, you will note the same cinematographers, writers, designers and actors.) All the while they operate from common cultural presuppositions and this above all gives their films, collectively, that unity of temper which is really their most distinguishing virtue. There can be no fruitful duplication of the French "New Wave" elsewhere, for you can't transplant a cultural assumption, and all attempts to do so, in this case, have produced embarrassingly empty results. As a Frenchman, the film-maker of today, like his elder contemporaries, sees life as logical, which is not to say he doesn't (therefore) see it as terrible, just as the Italian feels life as lyrical, which isn't to say he doesn't experience it also as a nightmare ($8\frac{1}{2}$ is here the consummate expression). The poverty of most Anglo-American films is (among other factors) the result of there being behind them no implicit life-feeling (which informs a rhythm as well as a philosophy). They never express, with any artistry, an inborn collective principle that goes deeper than the subject of the hour-and-a-half; their viewpoint, when you can isolate one, is always and only social—at a categorical level. They may, therefore (i.e. English films), develop ingratiating characterizations or (in the American film) a degree of soured wit and feckless energy, but they never acquire form from the perception by which they were conceived: they cannot define the cultural gamut within the shape and span of a single situation. The short way of saying this is to declare that our films are not made by poets.

I want to illustrate the range and the rich interdependence of French film-making with four films, three of them current, one from 1960. My justification for introducing a five-year-old film is my belief that among the critic's obligations is the salvaging of neglected films before they go softly into that dark night, a fate that appears to be overtaking Francois Leterrier's *Les Mauvais Coups.* But a primary question, because the answer is interesting: Who is Francois Leterrier? In 1956 he had no connection, to my knowledge, with film or any

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aspect of theatre, when, as a philosophy student, he was chosen by Robert Bresson, who detests professional actors, to assume the dominating role in *Un Condamné à Mort S'est Echappé*. By what means he was seduced from asking questions about phenomena to making imaginative constructs of them, I am not informed; I know only that soon afterward he was an assistant to Louis Malle and that by 1960 he had learned enough, if that's an adequate predication, to make *Les Mauvais Coups*. This was a peak year in French film releases, "New Wave" variety and others: among notable productions were Malle's *Zazie in the Metro,* Michel Drach's *Amalie,* Clouzot's *La Vérité,* Godard's *Breathless,* Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player,* Chabrol's *Les Bonnes Femmes,* Clément's *Plein Soleil* ("Purple Noon"), Doniol-Valcroze's *L'Eau à la Bouche,* François Reichenbach's *L'Amérique Insolite* and Jacques Becker's swan-song, *Le Trou* (now in the U.S. under the title, "The Night Watch"). In my opinion, only Becker's film and the Reichenbach "documentary" are, for evident reasons, more impressive than *Les Mauvais Coups:* no other film of that year, from France, and few since, can safely be nominated as a finer example of craftmanship subtly executed. Therein, perhaps, lies the reason for its obscurity: the term, "New Wave," became attached to special categories of film—those that featured obvious visual and temporal dislocations or those, on the other hand, that were as close as possible to unedited reportage (*cinéma vérité*). This sophomoric classification has successfully condemned to oblivion many sensitive films of the period in many countries—among them Leterrier's, which is no more "New Wave" than a sonata by Chopin.

Subject and setting are as old as French film; more to the point, they're as old as the French novel. Here is the chateau in the woods where countless women from Stendhal's Ernestine to Mauriac's Thérèse Desqueyroux have been bored to extinction or have murdered (or tried to murder) their husbands and lovers.[2] The only important difference in the contemporary version related by Leterrier is the proximity of a Casino and of a daily bottle of Johnny Walker, both permissible for the woman. It is not a saving difference. The antagonists, called Milan and Roberte, are self-doomed: he is an ex-champion of the automobile-racing world, voluntarily shackled to Roberte, whom he had ceased to love before he married her (from compassion). We learn, drop by dialogue drop, accumulating as gradually as the rain that closes down over the melancholy countryside, that a friend and racing companion of Milan had committed suicide on the track

[2] In 1962, Georges Franju did do a film version of Part I of Mauriac's novel, and you could well believe he had photographed the same oak trees that figured in Leterrier's film. With all respect to Franju, I think his film is inferior to Leterrier's: the editing is more uncertain, the transitions are more "theatrically" contrived. Since writing the above, I have seen *Diary of a Chambermaid,* manipulated, with acrid skill, from an earlier-period novel of Octave Mirbeau, wherein the 'same' setting, but with utterly charmless interiors, has become a *mise en scène* for the further scatology of Luis Buñuel.

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for love of Roberte, ten years before. She, in the perverse fashion of her kind (woman) has been ever since drinking herself into the age she deeply fears and driving daily nails into Milan to see how many he can bear and still stand up (or lie down?) like a man. When a young school-teacher arrives in the village, she sees another weapon with which to goad Milan to the brink by which she's actually horrified. Eaten by jealousy and fear even as she does so, Roberte proceeds to beautify the girl in her own former image, the better, she thinks, to get her into her husband's bed. The weapon backfires with admirable precision. Milan does fall in love with the girl but this only propels him into shaking off ten years of lethargy, writing a contract to drive again and leaving for Italy—alone. Long servitude to a lethal woman burns too much heart out of a man for him to believe he has enough left to risk on another. The girl is consoled, as they always are in such matters, by a dull young man lurking in the background. Roberte, having achieved the rejection she dreaded more than anything in the world, and deprived of her daily diet of torture, commits suicide by driving herself into a lake. In the counter-automotive last shot, the husband, in Modena, receives the news impassively as he straps on his helmet before taking his first test-run into "freedom."

The style of Leterrier's film suggests to me that he learned structure from Malle and restraint from Bresson. He made a better film than any so far made by his masters: he is never so dry as Bresson and he's more musically indolent than Malle. He shares, with many of his contemporaries, the one conspicuous advantage they have over such veterans as Renoir, Delannoy, Autant-Lara or Cayatte; they are less sententious than their elders. Leterrier handles symbolic motifs with graceful indirection; he assimilates "literary" textures with no loss of film values.[3] The opening sequence, so disingenuously played out by husband and wife, duck-shooting at dawn, supplies all the undertones necessary to prepare you for the mortal combat which will occupy the rest of the narrative. You don't get the full gravity in one discharge, either. Complete alienation is not the daily condition of such a relationship: even between handcuffed souls, love is as routine a habit as hate. So there are exchanges almost tender and disarming questions about the evening arrangements, little sparks of spite you're not quite sure were intended, all interjected between the sudden levelling of a gun, the mid-air collapse and spiralling descent of a dead bird—and at one moment Milan forcibly quiets Roberte (in one of those vain attempts one makes to ward off the irrevocable) by holding her attention to the neutral wonder of a pale sunrise sifting over the wet fields and the glum oaks. . . . And before getting far into the film you are

[3] The script is by Roger Vailland, from his own novel. In the same year, Vailland co-wrote the screen version of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (a related subject) for Roger Vadim's direction. A comparison of these two films would suffice, if other evidence were wanting, to illustrate Vadim's essential vulgarity. . . . So far as I know, Leterrier has not made a second film to date.

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forced to acknowledge how utterly right Simone Signoret is and how disastrous it would have been if Jeanne Moreau had played Roberte. I think most of us have by now come to similar conclusions about La Moreau: that with all her skill, which consists importantly in her instinct for variable degrees of *energy* (Signoret, by contrast, has a relatively unvarying pace), she has become, between one film and the next, simply unbearable to look at in closeup, since her consistently wanton expression is limited to roles where that is the required characteristic. Whereas the slowly impending effect of Roberte is devastating just because Signoret is not at once and prevailingly a bitch. As in all other films we've seen her in, she is unbelievably authentic with every move or preparation for one: the way she smokes without handling the cigarette, the art with which she manipulates domestic things—lipsticks, purses, knives, bottle-openers—the way she reviews all possibilities in her eyes before she says the one (damning or irrelevant) thing. And there's an interlude at the Casino that seems to have been designed for her to show everything she knows about non-acting.

Avec Des Si . . . (1964) is seemingly as different from Leterrier's film in subject and method as two movies can be, yet Leterrier and Claude Lelouch speak the same language—French. Lelouch may have a great future ahead of him: he's a trouble-maker. Three short documentaries from his hand have all been doused by the censors; one other feature film he has shown only to his friends (I don't know why; perhaps there's a connective reason). So far as we're concerned, then, *Avec Des Si* is his first film. (The title is untranslatable: my heavy approximation would be "Not Without Reservations.") I'd say he was closer kin to Reichenbach than to any contemporary whose work I have seen, for his film gets most of its fun and all of its dire point from its dialectical view of the big nasty crowd that constitutes present-day society, then shakes us with the unwelcome revelation of how tainted each of us is by that crowd's perspective. I can't adequately explain this remark if you haven't seen the film, since to do so would betray a strategy of which you have to be ignorant until then. Suffice it to explain that the film is structured as a special kind of suspense story. As substantially as I can narrate the action, we are accompanying a man on a drive through the French landscape to an unrevealed destination, and a third or more of the movie is taken up with establishing him in counterpoint with the distant swarmy world, by way of the car's radio, as he drives. The major motif of the broadcasts is the pursuit of an escaped prisoner, jailed for a sex crime, and the effect on us of the national news bulletins, particulars of which are *visualised* and abruptly cross-cut with the foreground business of the man driving, eating, resting and so on, is a growing conviction that balanced against the general depravity of man at large a sex maniac seems no more culpable (a reading, under the aspect of black humor, that recalls William Bolitho's appalling subterranean theme in *Murder for Profit*). By the

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time our lone driver has picked up a girl at a country tavern and resumed his journey, with the police in pursuit, across a now snow-covered landscape, we are prepared for the consequence of our deductions. In short, this is a "gimmick" film, and there's this to be said strongly in its favor: the mechanical area of the gimmick—the radio-news visualisation—is more amusing in itself than Godard's jump-cutting and moreover *functions* in the development of the narrative (though I can't say that Lelouch, in his enthusiasm, doesn't overwork the device). The classic French unity is preserved: once more there is that familiar double measure, the constriction followed by the release: the claustrophobia of the car and the inane scope of worldwide Man; the figure on the beach breathing freedom near the beginning of the film, the man on the lighthouse pier at the end. All in all, I think Lelouch comes near to what he claims to have attempted: the confrontation of the world with the life of one man. But what endears the film to me more than its forensics is its sheer poetry, the feeling for weather and movement and liberating space that Lelouch sustains while up to his deviltry. (For those who savor the technics of the business, *Avec Des Si* is alive with illustrations of how to use a zoom lens with maximum effect for plausible reasons.)

The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (1964) could also, I guess, be classified as a "novelty" film, albeit a prose summary would seem to refute the possibility of there being anything novel about it at all. Genevieve, who works in her mother's umbrella shop, loves Guy, a gas-station employee. When Guy is drafted into the Algerian war she is sure she'll die without him. After five months, during which either he hasn't written or his letters have miscarried, she (pregnant) accepts a rich suitor, Michel, who in fact seemed on the verge of being her *mother's* suitor. Guy returns and after a wild sulk appeases *himself* with his aunt's nurse who has waited for him more unrelentingly than Genevieve. On a snowy Christmas Eve (yes, indeed!), four years later, Genevieve, now a rich widow, stops her limousine at a gas station *owned* by Guy. Time rolls back, momentarily, as they try to say something nostalgic and relevant to each other; however, since Guy is happy with his fate, which includes a child of his own (decoyed into the snowflaked closing tableau), there is nothing to be said.

I can put myself in your place. If anyone recited the above to me I'd promptly say, "Yes, I've seen it." If they then protested that it was in color, I'd be likely to growl softly, "So what?" If they further insisted that the dialogue *was not spoken but sung, throughout,* I would close the subject with the icy observation that I had had it . . . . But Jacques Demy and Bernard Evein (responsible for the decors) have refuted our inferences with art: there's no more recherché way of putting it. Unlike Reginald Gardiner, who could imitate wallpaper vocally, I haven't the talent for explaining, in prose, *why* Demy's combination of singing and of exquisitely nuanced color transforms the timeless geo-

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metrical banality of human relationships into enchantment that misses, by a hair, the pitfalls of archness. If I say that the film, by these means, is situated in another dimension, I don't mean to imply metaphysics. I simply mean that like "The Importance of Being Earnest," for example, the pleasure is *artificial*—it is artifice, concerned approximately with daily life, yet as remote from it as a ballet. To approach this experience with any other expectation would be disastrous to your appreciating its quality. Demy has insisted that for him film is *form*—and *only form*. Whether or not he's guilty of making a false conceptual distinction is not so important as his being entitled to judgment in his own terms. His film is an exercise in style, like Agnes Varda's *Cleo*. Some critics heavily deprecated Miss Varda's effort in the mistaken belief that *she* believed she was creating a tragedy, whereas obviously, I should think, *Cleo* used mock tragedy as a subterfuge for a loving excursion into milieu. To be sure, *Umbrellas* is not everyone's fun. If you can only spend time on films that trouble the soul, stay away. But I would suppose it to have appeal for all those who enjoy, or claim to enjoy, the art of Vermeer, of Matisse or of Vuillard. It is definitely one way of making film. Godard's is a way of *un*-making it.

Umbrellas won not only the Louis Delluc prize but also the Grand Prize at Cannes where, on the same occasion, Robert Truffaut's *La Peau Douce* was first shown last year. This must have put Truffaut's nose out of joint, a chastening rebuff. I have had for some time the conviction that Truffaut is probably a "born" moviemaker, and I've wished he'd more quickly accept the inevitable and stop doing beastly things—like encouraging Godard, organizing claques against Antonioni, saying cute things for the Press and assisting the sinister apotheosis of "Tubby" Hitchcock, who became cinematic lard ages ago. *La Peau Douce* is welcome assurance, at least, that Truffaut is not bogging down in or being blown away on his own powers of virtuosity. The lightning bugs who jitter in Festival corridors have been sputtering like dampened wicks, unable to "place" this film in Truffaut's "development." Should they relate it to *The 400 Blows* or to *Shoot the Piano Player,* or should they assign it to outer darkness because there's no felt spray from the Wave on it—because it's a backtracking to "traditional" film-making, not central to, crucial for, or representative of the new generation of which Truffaut, himself, who wrote the script of *Breathless,* etcetera? . . . God forbid they should cease this vain bibble-babble and just acknowledge *La Peau Douce* as a damn good film, rich with social inflection, supple as the work of Ophuls.

The ill-chosen title ("The Soft Skin") conceals a baleful subject. This is one of those time machines the French put into motion so expertly. Life is a mechanism: some people survive and prosper in it, some are crushed before their hour, some can step out of the mechanism and back into it again without being missed and be carried on with no further hindrance to a ripe and disappointed age. Once in a

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while, even for the opulent and the heretofore lucky, the timing seriously and unaccountably miscarries: then—POOM! the whole thing blows up in the unsuspecting face. *La Peau Douce* is a suspense story but you don't know it is if you can't *feel* throughout that you're waiting for something (I mean something more than the sexual resolution)—with every take, every episode, every erotic or intellectual divertissement—that the purring dynamics, the propulsive strategies of the comings and goings, the synchronized operations of airplanes and automobiles and elevators, the departures from an unsuspecting wife, the perfunctory kissing of the children, the hasty conferences and assignations in hotels and motels, the pearls cast on the subject of Allegret's film about Gide, the ludicrous evasions of an importunate admirer in Rheims: that all this, much of it the tangled web of a triangle, that ancient bloody triangle, veils the brute fact that life is overtaking a man—a very nice shyly smiling man whom, as the film ends, you're beginning to love, maybe, because he's really too foolish, in a way you know, to be unconcerned about, too pure at heart to be reprobated, yet too knowing to be pitied . . . . This is Jean Desailly: you wouldn't believe he could play any other part if you hadn't seen him as a chief of detectives, all softly beaming face, a resolute walk and a heart of tungsten. The girl is Françoise Dorleac and I suppose she has charm—she's more piquant than Miss Stewart, who occupied the same position in Leterrier's triangle—but three weeks after seeing the film I can't remember what she looks like. The *actress* in the film is Nelly Benedetti (wife), perfectly in control, not one bit anxious to show you any more than her perfunctory self until provoked (though her contours are unmistakable), knowing to the second how long to coast, where the accents fall in a scene, how to hoard, when—and how!—to explode, refulgent and final like a shower of Roman candles.

And I suppose that all the coy attention to silent-film comedy and gangster films that Truffaut indulges may be explicable as the clown side of the recognition he pays to the patently malevolent role that timing plays in the destiny of a man. For at the eleventh hour in *La Peau Douce,* the irrevocable doesn't have to be. The girl knows what world the man belongs in better than he does, and why it's not hers; all the man has to do is choke it down and strap himself back into the machine, with one more regressive dream to befuddle himself with in whatever spare time he has earned with his fame . . . . If only his wife hadn't chosen that moment in which to send his suit to the cleaners; if only he had had the change with which to make those two telephone calls consecutively! A coincidence: that demonic plaything of logic, supposed not to be logical—or is it supposed not to be artistic? When art employs coincidence we call it unnatural, yet a coincidence in life we see as a crowning jest from art. . . .

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B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

AFTER HEARING THE BARITONE FISCHER-DIESKAU only on records for several years I heard him at last in the concert hall—with the New York Philharmonic in performances of Wolf's *Harfenspieler Lieder* and Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen,* in a recital of Schubert songs, and in the American Opera Society's presentation of Busoni's *Doktor Faust.* On records his extraordinary vocal and musical powers had produced performances that left one overwhelmed; in the concert hall not only did the singing itself have greater impact from being experienced directly, but it was reinforced by what one saw: the chubby, pleasant face which, as the song began, changed into a powerful and affecting dramatic mask that registered the singer's intense involvement in his performance; the body whose changes of stance were a further manifestation of this involvement and also, at the end of one phrase, prepared the listener for the phrase that was to begin. The complete personal commitment and involvement was like what one remembered in Flagstad's singing, and as moving; and the performances were the kind one is grateful for having lived to experience.

Busoni's music has its cult, for reasons that were not discernible in *Doktor Faust*—to my ear the writing of a highly accomplished composer able to make elaborate gestures of saying the portentous things he didn't really have to say. It was a waste of Fischer-Dieskau's gifts; but their exercise even on nothing created interest in what otherwise would have been an unendurably boring three hours.

Another musician whom I heard for the first time in concert after years of hearing him on records was the conductor Scherchen. The records have created a Scherchen cult, whose uncritical attitude has made its members not only appreciative of his real and impressive powers but deaf to his equally real eccentricity, which produces, among other things, the perversely slow tempo of the allegro first movement of a Haydn symphony, or the sudden willful slowing down in the course of the presto finale, or even the excessively slow tempo of the slow movement. That predilection for slow tempos was evident in the performance of Mozart's *Requiem* that I heard Scherchen conduct in Philharmonic Hall—not only in the opening adagio in which he beat eight to the bar instead of four, or in the andante alla breve in which he beat four instead of two, but also in the deliberate allegros. Yet he was able to give the music some impressive effect even in this slow-moving, massive performance suited to Bach rather than to Mozart, whose music called instead for the animation and grace of the marvelous performance of the *Requiem* conducted by Cantelli at the

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Edinburgh Festival of 1950, of which I heard a tape recording only the night before.

If the Concert Opera Association's first American presentation of Donizetti's opera *Maria Stuarda* left me with the impression that this work was one of his routine, mechanical exercises of his style, this may be because of the poor quality of the principals' voices and the characterless singing and playing of music which requires sensitive molding and articulating of its phrases to give it character, validity and expressive effect.

That performance was the occasion of my first visit this season to Philharmonic Hall, which the critic of the *Herald Tribune* had reported "finally sounds like a concert hall" after the three reconstruction jobs; and I sat in row W of the Orchestra, in front of the *New Yorker* critic who had written that we could now "abandon our worries about the sound of the sound in our newest concert hall." But while the low strings of the small orchestra were now in better balance with the rest, and the sound was natural and agreeable, it still seemed distant and too small for the vast space. It was after this that I heard Scherchen's performance of the Mozart *Requiem* from row G and Fischer-Dieskau's performances with the Philharmonic from row J; and it was only when I was that close to the orchestras that I heard voluminous warm sound all around me like that of Carnegie Hall. Elsewhere one hears not only the poorer sound I heard from row W but the much worse defects of balance and quality reported to me by people who have sat in the balconies. And since there is to be no further reconstruction, New Yorkers will hear music in Philharmonic Hall the next hundred years with its sound falsified in those ways. Nor are the fatuous comments of the two critics I have quoted the worst: the *Times* critic, reporting the lack of balance in Scherchen's performance of a Bach cantata, added: "But, of course, he is not very familiar with Philharmonic Hall and its special problems"—as though a conductor familiar with these problems would be expected from now on to be able to adjust the playing of his orchestra to them so that the defects in sound caused by the hall would be eliminated.

I presume most people have the idea I had—that Leo Beranek, the expert engaged to make Philharmonic Hall acoustically perfect, had provided specifications which had been executed exactly, and that the responsibility for the disastrous result was entirely his. Actually, I have been reliably informed, since he was only a consultant, he had only made recommendations, and not all of these had been carried out. This had been the case right from the start with the all-important dimensions of the auditorium: the width he had specified was greatly increased to provide room for wider seats. Later the important movable "clouds," with which he had expected to be able to make corrections if necessary, had been made immovable: this had saved the cost of making them movable, but made it impossible to correct defects after the initial "tuning" of the auditorium. And this tuning, which

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he had expected to do when the auditorium was completed, he had had to do when it was filled with scaffolding and the seats were not yet installed. It is not surprising that the sound accepted as right by the auditors at this tuning turned out to be wrong when the scaffolding had been removed, the seats had been installed, and they were occupied by an audience. Beranek had expected to make corrections during the first year with his movable clouds; but with the clouds immovable he had to wait until the end of the season. But with the continuing uproar in the press Lincoln Center chose to make an impressive gesture before that: it called in four other experts to prescribe necessary changes. By the end of the season Beranek had reached a conclusion about the cause of the defects and the remedy—a small and inexpensive alteration job. But his report and recommendation were ignored, and the big and costly reconstruction job recommended by the other experts was carried out. I don't want to be understood as saying that if Beranek's original specifications had all been executed, or if he had been allowed to make his correction, we would have the perfect concert hall we don't have: as a friend remarked, a man whose ears tell him, as Beranek's did, that Carnegie Hall is not one of the best is a man who may produce something like Philharmonic Hall. I merely wish to correct the idea that Philharmonic Hall was the disastrous result of 100 percent execution of Beranek's specifications.

I had avoided any stage performance of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* since my first in 1929—that of the Milan Scala company under Toscanini. For I knew I would never get in another what I experienced in this one, not only in the treatment of the music but in the scenery, costumes and direction: the respect for the work's own style and conventions that gave them validity and force, and thus gave the work the value and effect it could have for an audience today. However duty called me to the Metropolitan's new production, which turned out in fact to be very different from the Scala's in 1929. In the words of Margherita Wallman, who directed, "the architectural framework of Attilio Colonelli's scenery, mounted on mobile platforms which create continuously changing ambience and perspectives, symbolizes the irrational element which parallels the transformation and final disintegration of Lucia's mind. The scene, therefore, is never symmetrical and the same plane on which the characters move about unfolds itself into a geometric but labyrinthical platform which has no direct points of conjunction. Etc." What this described was a number of huge, ponderous constructions framing an excessively cluttered stage; and to this Mme. Wallman, originally a dancer and choreographer, added the excessive stage movement that some of the directors whom Mr. Bing has brought in from the non-operatic theater mistakenly introduce into opera. They don't understand that the beginning of an aria or an ensemble is a point for action to stop and the music to take over; and so we have had the unending hubbub of Cyril Ritchard's *Figaro* and Zeffirelli's *Falstaff,* and now the Wallman

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Lucia, in which the famous sextet, instead of being allowed to hold attention with the musical embodiment of the thoughts and emotions of the principal characters, was made a musical accompaniment of the continuing movement and grouping of the chorus of lords, ladies and soldiers. The musical performance might have had something like the tension and shape Toscanini gave it if Schippers had conducted, but didn't get it from Varvisio's placid timebeating. What excitement there was was generated by Sutherland's singing: I was troubled again by the unattractive drabness of the lower range of her voice and her mannered use of it in melodic passages; but the deployment of the bright upper range was exciting in its mere control and security, its musical style, in sustained melody as well as rapid florid passages.

The New York City Opera presented still another dreary episode in the unending cultural ballet performed in recent years by the company with the Ford Foundation and some of the critics—in which each production of a worthless new American opera by the company as a result of a grant from the Foundation has elicited a statement by Winthrop Sargeant that the Foundation's support is bringing about a veritable explosion of exciting creative activity in American opera, whereupon the Foundation has made a further grant that has caused yet another worthless new work to be written, produced by the company, and praised by Mr. Sargeant. This time it was *Natalia Petrovna,* with a libretto by William Ball, who should have known better, that was a shocking mutilation and coarsening of Turgenev's *A Month in the Country,* and music by Lee Hoiby, whose struggle to produce what he was incapable of—music worth listening to for its intrinsic quality and its expressive relevance to the dramatic situation—was painful to listen to. With the production of this work Julius Rudel demonstrated again that he has a gift for promotional ideas which bring in foundation money and publicity, but not the gift of artistic taste, values and standards that is more important in the director of an opera company. And a further demonstration of this was provided by his decision, when putting on Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov,* to use the Rimsky-Korsakov version. It isn't merely Stravinsky who has declared that "Rimsky's Meyerbeerization of Musorgsky's 'technically imperfect' music could no longer be tolerated"; by now even Harriet Johnson of the New York *Post* knows that if one performs *Boris* one should perform Musorgsky's own *Boris.* But Mr. Rudel still doesn't know it.

Nobody has improved on the twenty-year-old Bernard Shaw's description of the "highest faculty of a conductor" as "the establishing of a magnetic influence under which an orchestra becomes as amenable to the *bâton* as a pianoforte to the fingers." Thomas Dunn clearly hasn't this highest faculty; but apparently he is able, at rehearsals, to get his Festival Orchestra of New York to play with the good tone and sensitive phrasing I heard in the performances of the engaging little Symphony K.114 and the Piano Concertos K.451 and 488 of Mozart. It may have been because I sat too close to the stage that I

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heard occasional harsh tone and lack of clarity in the usually admirable playing of Leon Fleisher; or it may have been because he hadn't played these two concertos much, and that this was the reason for a couple of false notes in a climactic phrase of the incandescent perpetuum-mobile finale of K.488. Concerning the infrequently played K.451 Michael Steinberg wrote in the program notes that it "begins with a military cliché, and . . . its opening gestures are those of robust and familiar simplicity. . . . But all this avoidance of complexity at this stage serves to prepare the subtleties that follow. . . . This seems to be the technique throughout the concerto: the constant turning of the familiar into the unexpected." The technical operation that turns the familiar into the unexpected may make the work fascinating to a scholarly program annotator; but for the listener it doesn't turn the uninteresting ideas that make K. 451 a dull work into something comparable with the profusion of marvels that makes K. 488 exciting.

At the Festival Orchestra concert at which the Italian composer Dallapiccola conducted a program of his music, the succession of works offered a variety of ingenious combinations of sonorities which were not a medium of expressive communication for me, and which in only one instance—the *Cinque frammenti di Saffo*—I found attractive to the ear merely as combinations of sonorities.

Witold Rowicki didn't illustrate Shaw's description of the highest faculty of a conductor at the Warsaw Philharmonic's concert in the Carnegie Hall Festival of Visiting Orchestras; nor was the orchestra of a caliber that warranted its being brought here for us to hear. But the soloist, the violinist Wanda Wilkomirska, played with a technical and musical security that made me wish I were hearing her in a Mozart concerto instead of one by Karlowicz that sounded like the writing of another Glazunov.

The young English conductor Colin Davis and the London Symphony, at their concert in the Carnegie Hall series, produced a performance of Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony which didn't have the clarity and force of some of Davis's performances of Mozart on records, or the tonal beauty of the orchestra's recorded performances. But both conductor and orchestra operated very impressively in Walton's Symphony No. 1.

A Carnegie Hall concert of the Boston Symphony gave me my first opportunity to observe Erich Leinsdorf as a symphonic conductor—this after a few recordings which had offered precise and beautiful playing by the orchestra in leaden performances of Beethoven's *Eroica*, Mozart's *Jupiter* and Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* music. In the Carnegie Hall performance of Dvořák's Symphony No. 3 it was clear that the enlivening effect of Leinsdorf's conducting on the progression—the effect of all his fancy stick-work and gestures—was zero. Note succeeded note—now in a crescendo, now in a decrescendo, now in an acceleration, now in a retardation; but there was no binding of the notes into phrases with cohesive tension and shape, no building

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up of tension and power in the crescendo, no release of tension in the decrescendo. Thinking back to his performances in the opera house, which had seemed more effective, I could see that the operation there had been a different one, because of the singers on the stage in addition to the orchestra in the pit. Even if Leinsdorf had done no more than set the traditional tempos and keep singers and orchestra together in them, there had been the life the singers imparted to the vocal parts to keep one from noticing the lack of life in the orchestral part. And as he fitted playing to singing he may have been impelled by the life in the vocal phrase to impart a similar life to the orchestral phrase.

The harpsichordist Rafael Puyana, finally, I also heard for the first time. Much of his program didn't interest me; but his sensitive treatment of the music and considerate mastery of the instrument were a pleasure to hear.

Wondering about the New York City Ballet's "new" production of *The Nutcracker,* I found it difficult to believe that Balanchine could think up a new Christmas party for the first act in place of the beautifully imagined old one; and it turned out that he had left the entire first act unchanged, and in the second act had changed only the opening scene with the Angels and the dances for *Hot Chocolate, Coffee* and *Marzipan Shepherdesses.* The new Arabian dance for *Coffee* struck me as better than what it replaced (though possibly not exactly for children); but I preferred the richer rhythmic counterpoint of the old *Marzipan Shepherdesses,* and also the old opening scene—though this may have been because the young dancers used in the new one were insecure and awkward. What was entirely new was the scenery of Rouben Ter-Arutunian; and I didn't like the lacy Christmas-card-like frame around the proscenium, thought the huge masses of snow that threatened to engulf the dancing Snowflakes in Act 1 were bad, and was appalled by the setting for Act 2, which—instead of the subtly imagined scene that Tchaikovsky's wonderful prelude prepared one for—offered a piling up of sundaes and the like in the pictorial style of an ice-cream ad. But Karinska's genius for color and shape in costume outdid itself in some of her new costumes—the Spanish ones for *Hot Chocolate* above all, and those for the Dance of the Flowers.

In addition to Allegra Kent's Sugar Plum Fairy, which exhibited her exquisite fluidity undiminished after her long absence, I saw Patricia McBride's and Suzanne Farrell's, each lovely in its own style, but missed Mimi Paul's. Variously lovely too were the Dew Drops of McBride, Jillana, Farrell and Patricia Neary; and d'Amboise and Villella were superb Cavaliers in their different ways, with Villella's personal grace and warmth making his the way I liked better (though I was bothered by the over-elaborate movements of his right arm and hand). The lesser solo parts were excellently done, except in *Candy Canes;* and at one performance the Little Prince of Luis Greco was astonishing in its authority and force of presence and projection.

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The *Times* and *Herald Tribune* critics are right in contending that the New York City Ballet should announce dancers as well as ballets in advance, but wrong in their reason. The company's policy of not announcing dancers is objectionable, they say, because its result is that someone attending a performance in the expectation of seeing a ballerina like Melissa Hayden sees some inexperienced young dancer or other instead. But I find this irresponsible slinging around of words objectionable. Hayden is a very efficient dancer, but—lacking the exquisiteness of changing bodily configuration, the poetic aura that one can see Margot Fonteyn's dancing has—Hayden is not what one can see Fonteyn is, a ballerina. And for anyone who judges not by names and words but by what he sees, the "inexperienced young dancers" Mimi Paul and Suzanne Farrell whom the company has been offering occasionally in place of Hayden are not only amazingly strong in technique but equally amazing in the qualities of exquisite style and poetry that make them more fascinating and exciting to watch than Hayden. But I agree that it should be possible for anyone who prefers Hayden to Paul or Farrell to see Hayden. And in general it seems to me that when a ballet is performed on different nights with different dancers the company should make it possible for a person to see it with the dancer he prefers—*Raymonda Variations* with d'Amboise rather than Prokovsky, *Apollo* with Villella rather than d'Amboise, *Swan Lake* with Verdy rather than Wilde, or, if he prefers, the other way round.

HENRY GELDZAHLER

The Art Audience and the Critic

THE HISTORY OF MODERN ART is also the history of the progressive loss of art's audience. Art has increasingly become the concern of the artist and the bafflement of the public. It is not a popular audience that was lost, not an audience made up of the great mass of the people, but an educated, enlightened and enfranchised class of art connoisseurs, the aristocracy and church hierarchy of the pre-French revolutionary period. The artist of the Renaissance, Baroque and eighteenth century knew for whom he was painting. His small audience was clearly defined and there was a shared body of knowledge, literary and artistic, that patron and artist took for granted. Thus, if a myth were referred to in a work or if a work were commissioned to illustrate a personally and particularly meaningful myth or historical incident, no one for whom it was intended would find it a difficult picture; at times a complicated literary painting might be an elegant visual puzzle, but there

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was an answer and the problem could be solved. It was not until the false-start toward the democratization of art in the nineteenth century that the professional critic became a necessary buffer between the painter and the public. A new profession, that of interpreter of art to a general public, became established.

As painting became less dependent upon a complicated and shared literary apparatus and more involved, in the course of the nineteenth century, with common and contemporary experience, it began to look in upon itself, upon its own inner necessities and mechanics. Surely the long and complex history of landscape painting which culminated in the nineteenth century is not about the history of landscape (geology) but rather about the formal problems suggested by the rigid format of earth, horizon line and sky, and the variations possible within this framework.

It must be with the Impressionists, the culmination in a sense of this landscape development, that we date the obvious split engendered by an art advanced for its day and a public led in its ridicule by hostile critics. Courbet and Daumier, in the years immediately preceding the Impressionists were criticized too, but within the context of art; they were never dismissed as flingers of paint in the face of the public. It is undoubtedly true that the best audience and in a sense the only audience for Impressionist painting in its early years was the artist. Art had definitely begun to turn in on itself in a process that has continued for a hundred years.

The audience for art in our own time is still a specialized one. There has grown up in this generation a relatively small group as learned and knowing as the eighteenth century connoisseurs. The ground however has shifted and the specialist's knowledge today is not literary but formal. It is not the mythology and poetry, the Greek and Latin of the humanist, but the morphology of the art of the past century, the history of forms and movements in modern art, that is the necessary equipment for a full comprehension of the best in contemporary art.

The most important developments in the art of this century in their logical and inevitable sequence (inevitable of course only after the fact —and unpredictable before) are open and available, at first, only to the narrow but passionately interested audience for art made up largely of the painters and their immediate coterie. It has been the increasing concern with the basic elements of painting, the painter's vocabulary, with no concessions to an hypothetical audience out there that seemed unable or prepared to care anyway, that has slimmed and attenuated the public for art to an alert and interested few attuned to the closest scrutiny of formal variations and adjustments that seem slight or nonexistent to the inexperienced, but are deeply meaningful and rich to those who have done the work of looking.

The critic speaks to the audience out front and points to the paintings behind him. He is an unfortunately necessary link in the communication between the artist and the public. The good critics of the

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past hundred years have been the audience for art, the artists themselves and their writer friends. This coterie aspect of art criticism smacks of cabal but has proved necessary. The Impressionists, Cubists, and Abstract Expressionists all had their critics, intimate with the artists from the early years of the movements. The public in most cases first heard sympathetically about the artists and paintings from the coterie, the artists' friends. The critics wrote and lectured, often persuasively, about art the public found difficult to accept. It was probably the early verbal formulation of much of the esthetic theory, formal analysis, and conceptual programs of modern movements by critics who were so intimately acquainted with the work, that gave the removed, private and even esoteric air to the early years of each movement in the best art of our century.

The problem of audience is a crucial one to the critic; whom exactly is he addressing? Is he an interpreter of difficult, recondite or shocking art to an already interested audience or to a wider general audience? Or is he talking only to the most interested audience of all, the most deeply concerned and committed, the artists themselves? The critic who conceives of the artist as his audience is rare. But even here, his effectiveness is limited by the very fact of the medium in which he expresses himself, words. Paintings lead to paintings, words never do. For this reason exposure to the art of the past, both historical and recent, is essential to the intelligent comprehension of painting today. Words can point, direct the attention of the audience to certain painting of the past or very recent past, but they can never be the substitutes for looking at works of art. Words, unaided pictorially, can summarize and organize visual information and in this the critic is helpful. But painting is not verbal; it escapes words and words cannot evoke with sufficient accuracy the effect or look or style which is the complexity of a successful painting or sculpture. The creation of a work of art has required far too many complex and manifold decisions, has referred to far too many works already in existence, to be covered adequately by words. In short the critical task is an impossible one, but none the less worth doing for that.

In the past four decades the best artists have limited themselves in format so that an entire career, an entire productive life, consists in ringing changes on a single theme. In this Mondrian, with the example of Monet's Cathedrals and Haystacks before him, was the pioneer. From 1920 to his death in 1944 Piet Mondrian stayed in his work with the right angle, the three primary colors and black and white. Within these strictures his work changed and became more complex; essentially it was a difficult art to viewers unprepared to look hard, comfortingly dismissable to those hostile or indifferent as nothing but the same picture painted over and over again.

There is something messianic in Mondrian's career and work. The implication is that he has gotten hold of the truth, not one truth among many, but the single eternal truth. It is necessary to the psy-

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chology of the obsessed artist, the artist who stays with a single theme over a great many years, to be exclusive and single-tracked in his thinking. This is in no way surprising, for it would be impossible to stay with an objective personal vision for more than a single painting if the stance from which the artist was working weren't held firmly and consistently.

What happens to the audience in this development? The artist who is tough on himself is that much tougher on his audience. But then there is no easy public art; there is only private, difficult art that is accessible to the public willing to make the effort. With Mondrian we have the first example of an artist who has stripped his work and who spends a major portion of his career working out and adjusting, arranging and changing his basic simple image and never feeling that it is quite right for the next picture, or that he wants to repeat it. That is the greatness of his art and of that of our most advanced recent painters: Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Frank Stella. They never feel they know how to make a Still, Newman, or Noland. Each rethinks his problem each time he starts a painting. And while they learn from their own experience, it must always be a renewed experience, never a remembered one. A painter who repeats himself meaninglessly, emptily, is remembering or trying to remember what it felt like to paint a picture last year. That doesn't work. The great men stay in touch with the wellsprings of their own creativity and are constantly recreating the impulse and energy that must inform their work. It is not surprising that this work is not instantly available to the public or easily absorbed. It is an artist's art; a critical examination of painting by painters, not necessarily for painters, but for experienced viewers. The problem of creative fecundity and excitement and a maintained level of inspiration and execution is much more acute in the stripped and repeated images of today's painting. For the painter limiting himself to a self-imposed and invented vocabulary, simple shapes and their relationships, there is literally no place to hide. This is the strength of the art and its emptiness when it goes bad. All is out in the open for everyone to see. That doesn't make it easier to see, but, paradoxically, more difficult. There is no anecdote, no allusion except to other art, nothing outside art itself that might make the viewer more comfortable or give him something to talk about.

Actually, the effort toward making differences from picture to picture is not art, it is artiness, exactly that which is extraneous to the picture making. The attempt to make it look different can have nothing to do with the generative processes that produce the painting. Such an attempt can only be socially ordained, as for instance, in the effort toward a more interesting or varied show. If the picture is painted in exactly the way it has to be, it will look different enough from the last picture, which had to be painted in the way it was, to satisfy anyone

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who is interested in looking long and hard at paintings; and that finally is the only audience the pictures will have anyway.

In the past eighty years or so the artist has been influenced not only by the advanced art of his own day and that immediately preceding, but by a new critical awareness of the entire history of art. If pictures lead to pictures, then the new availability of a much wider range of images and symbols from the art of all the world and all of history must have its effect. In past centuries artists were aware of the traditions of their own community; and, occasionally, due to trade caravans or pilgrimage routes, or to the portability of small religious objects, the easy dissemination of prints, or travels by the artists themselves, an influence foreign to the home tradition would be felt and immediately absorbed. Now we no longer have trade routes; we have *Art News,* Harry Abrams, Phaidon, André Malraux and jet travel—instant international communication. Between them nothing is unavailable. This in addition to widening enormously the possible influences on an artist multiplies incalculably the amount of visual material that can, and in many cases must, be brought to bear in the intelligent appreciation of contemporary art. The artist as art historian, as scholar of the history of art, makes the professional art historian his logical audience, and in the past decade it has been in this professional group that much of the early appreciation of new and difficult art has taken place.

The potentially interested viewer need not feel left out or hostile. The paintings exist and are in public collections; the very same paintings that influenced the artists and led to the important changes and breakthroughs in style of the past decades can be seen; for instance, in the permanent exhibitions of the Museum of Modern Art and in the Guggenheim Collection. The Kandinskys, Kupkas, and Delaunays, the Picassos and Matisses, the Malevitchs and Mondrians of the first two decades of this century have entered public collections, although not perhaps as rapidly or generally (that is outside New York) as one might wish. Just as the painters have seen them, so can the public. The Museum of Modern Art and the college art history courses have helped create this new and aware audience for advanced painting. But all they can really do is to expose the audience to the art. The critic, curator or historian of modern art can only point.

There is something unpleasant in the realization that the true audience for new art is so small and so specialized. The unpleasantness comes from an idea about an ideal audience or an ideal art, or rather an ideal relationship between the great democratic public and the artist performing his social function; self-revelation made generally available. In truth, despite all the education available through our art museums, periodicals, and college art-history departments, the process remains slow, the converts few, and true understanding rare. Whether this situation is ideal or necessary is a matter for speculation. It is and has been the situation for several decades and is not likely soon to change.

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Reviews

MARVIN MUDRICK

All That Prose[1]

"IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO BE MEANINGFUL, for literature to be meaningful only to the happy few, whomever they may be," writes Arlene Zekowski, whomever she may be. What she rashly does, besides wringing the neck of grammar and syntax, is to disclaim their authority, in one of a pair of eccentric books that ought to be entitled *His* and *Hers*. Stanley Berne and Miss Zekowski are (according to the back covers) husband and wife; and their collaboration goes still further. *Abraxas* and *The Multiple Modern Gods* share the same lengthy introductory apparatus: a solemn essay by Sir Herbert Read, sponsor of fifty-year-old avant-garde slogans (like an Anglican parson conducting a jazz mass); "Notes on the Neo-Narrative," by Miss Zekowski; excerpts from a previously published volume by husband and wife, which proposed to prove that "in so far as present use is concerned, the novel as we now know it is dead." Each book then takes off on its own, in matter if not in manner or purpose, for a section of unusually sympathetic commentary by the author on some part of the text to follow; next, a Foreword by the author; and finally, filling out the last two thirds of each volume, the text itself. The text may therefore be said to have no fewer than five different internal testimonials to its validity, novelty, necessity, and intelligibility. The package begins to displace the product: the blurb has slithered off the dustjacket and metastasized through the pages themselves. We may look, now, for Post Toasties boxes in which every third cornflake is made of plastic and stamped with a certification of the nutritive value of the other two.

[1] ABRAXAS, by *Arlene Zekowski*. George Wittenborn. $5.00. THE MULTIPLE MODERN GODS AND OTHER STORIES, by *Stanley Berne*. George Wittenborn. $5.00. THE BLUE ROOM and THE ACCOMPLICES, by *Georges Simenon*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $4. 95. THE ERASERS, by *Alain Robbe-Grillet*. Grove. $4.95. JEALOUSY AND MEDICINE, by *Michal Choromanski*. New Directions. $4.50. ROSA AT TEN O'CLOCK, by *Marco Denevi*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $3.95. I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING, by *Hans Koningsberger*. Simon and Schuster. $3.95. ALL THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE, by *Richard Dowling*. Dial. $4.95. DRIVE, HE SAID, by *Jeremy Larner*. Dial. $3.95. CABOT WRIGHT BEGINS, by *James Purdy*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $4.95. THE KEY TO MY HEART, by *V. S. Pritchett*. Random House. $3.95. CHILDREN OF VIOLENCE (MARTHA QUEST and A PROPER MARRIAGE), by *Doris Lessing*. Simon and Schuster. $7.50. THE SUN OF DEATH, by *Pandelis Prevelakis*. Simon and Schuster. $4.50. THE DOOR IN THE WALL, by *Oliver LaFarge*. Houghton Mifflin. $4.95. THE NIGHT OF THE GIRAFFE AND OTHER STORIES, by *Alfred Andersch*. Pantheon. $3.95. SHORT FRIDAY, by *Isaac Bashevis Singer*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $4.95.

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Doubtless the authors' conscious aim is to prepare the public for what might otherwise seem an immense and trackless originality; though Sir Herbert, taking his stand for "the resurrection of the word," warns us against anything so prosaic as consciousness:

> Even to seek the true word is a step in the wrong direction, for if we consciously seek to match experience (feeling) and word, we automatically [observe Sir Herbert's identification of "conscious" with "automatic"] resort to the familiar cliché. Our conscious mind is a vast dictionary of clichés.
>
> A further difficulty arises from the syntactical habit, from the habitual resort to grammatical phrases. When Mallarmé told Degas that poems were made with words not ideas, his intention was the right one, but he should not have implied that poems are "made" (i.e. consciously composed by a *deus ex machina,* the poet). He realized well enough that the conscious poet, the poet as a personality, has to withdraw from the scene and in a very real sense let the poem write itself. What should happen, in the allocentric perception of reality, is that the *word* should present itself, without that diminution of force that comes from declension and other syntactical drags. The word in its integrity, its uninflected thing-sound correspondence (not necessarily onomatopoeic), that alone is the poetic word.

Not that neo-narrative doesn't take a bit of effort. The reader, says Sir Herbert, must submit himself to "a new discipline . . . a tense state of awareness and apprehension" (relaxed tension? unconscious awareness? fearless apprehension?), as if walking through a minefield. But the effort is worthwhile. "What is engendered," says Sir Herbert, "is a complex of words, an absolute of utterance." In neo-narrative, as Mr. and Mrs. Berne remark reminiscently,

> . . . the tools of language once more join in the sexual union of their proper marriage and allow the genes of discovery to allow for new arrangements; so that the product is a continuum of beauties on each page; so that you can stop and linger and not hurry and observe the view of the contours . . .

Tense with awareness and apprehension, we arrive at the opening of *Abraxas:*

> The bitterness. That bands. Rejects. And savors. Of the wound. It purifies.

Etcetera for over a hundred pages: platitude reduced by a rain of periods to its component phrases, absolute platitude; rhythms of absolute banality, sequences of metronomic iambs drifting readily into passages of stupefying blank verse—

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> And leaves of gathered deadwood. So to speak. To figure in their accidents of rule. As not to know. By how. By where. By far. But only as we rustle up the air.

So it's a surprise, turning to Mr. Berne's text after *Abraxas* and the rubbish of the multiple modern manifestoes, to come upon moments of interest: some modulations in the speaking voice, occasionally expressive elisions, a proper respect for so unavoidable an ancestor as Joyce—

> . . . the stomach that takes a cold, the sweat that neck and forehead, the hair recede, holidays yearly and family ties, of brothers almost enemies, of no thought, same name, of prison, once, he changed his name, of her fear, her wit, save money, of property that looked good but was cheap, sold, as estate of middle age, of his insides old as 85 though only 65, of withered organs, ball on the right distended, sack loose, organ hang, she refusing, they nervous, stayed up nights, the daughter seeing cruel of mother, lack love, separate, save, calculate, cold, as snake she withdrew, then sick, the sickness render him helpless as they live and do not talk, separate, the prison of house, room, a river flow, of cysts and polyps that impede blood, of the spores of this climate that moist, feed and rise . . .

Nevertheless Mr. Berne's conventions (which he calls "freedoms"), even when they allow him to move at all, are more hobbling than those he plans to explode. Maybe it isn't time yet for the resurrection of the word; or the death and transfiguration of that punchdrunk old vagabond, the novel, that reprobate with a weakness for mere prose.

Maybe talking about the decline of the novel is like talking about the decline of the digestive tract. It is true that the novel as the special bourgeois instrument for killing time has long since been replaced by the movies and TV, except for the few snobs who still insist on their nightcap of Ray Bradbury or Erle Stanley Gardner. Fiction may notwithstanding have an unbudgeable identity: not the story-telling impulse with which it allies itself, but a brute appetite for what's going on here and now, for masses of the slight, private, transitory details of consciousness (history's raw data, not Sir Herbert's pure and timeless word). No doubt good fiction is something more, it may even come to look something like poetry as critics and revolutionaries are always confidently anticipating. But when Turgenev, weary of Tolstoy's attentiveness to detail, deplored "all that sniffing of armpits," he was defining fiction; when James complained of such "loose, baggy monsters" as Tolstoy's and Dostoievsky's novels, he was defining fiction. Poets and allegorists just don't warm to all that prose.

For the allegorist, details are not things but indicators, signs, clues (fiction is pluralistic, there can never be too many things; allegory is monistic, there are no things but only the idea, the goal, the solution). The detective story is debased allegory, in a time when signs may be

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mysterious but are no longer numinous: the implicit order toward which details direct themselves is not metaphysical but logical, an order of formal and cumulative commonplace.

Georges Simenon has for decades been touted as the detective-story writer who turned a craft into an art (detective-story readers are on the defensive, like alcoholics and overweight women). Gide many years ago called him "perhaps the greatest and most truly 'novelistic' novelist in French literature today"; and the blurb declares that *The Blue Room* and *The Accomplices* "develop with the inevitability and speed of Greek tragedy." They are in fact, as one might infer from such defiant encomia, fluent hackwork, each of them launched in a burst of Frenchy firecrackers:

> . . . Andrée naked still on the ravaged bed, her legs apart, a few drops of semen clinging to the dark hair, shadowy between her thighs.

So much for the opening of *The Blue Room*; and here is *The Accomplices,* page one:

> It did not occur to him to free his hand which Edmonde continued to press between her thighs. . . .

Each story paces itself with athletic assurance to its preordained length of one hundred and fifty pages, just long enough to bridge the chasm between the last after-dinner drink and the second Nembutal. Each more or less skilfully cranks out its slick time-tricks, pretexts for rounding past into present, latent clues into belated consciousness—the interview with the probing psychiatrist (Did you really love her when you married her?), the furrowed brow of self-scrutiny (Could I have guessed that my mistress was planning to murder my wife?), the continual attempts to calculate one's success or failure at concealing the evidences of guilt (Did I put on a convincing performance when I was told about the accident? Did the man on the hill note my license number when I turned the car off the main road?). Simenon does rather disillusion the American reader who hopes that, if the French *must* be sentimental about love, they will at least be so in unfamiliar ways:

> One did not spend one's whole life in bed, in a room shimmering with sunlight, experiencing the savage frenzy of naked passion.
>
> Gisèle was his companion, Marianne's mother, the one who got up first in the morning to light the fire, who kept the house clean and bright, and who asked no questions when he came home to her.
>
> They would grow old together, drawing closer to one another with the years, sharing a common store of memories. . . .

Another surprise, for the uninitiated, is Simenon's carelessness in his plots, which if they are not perfect logic are nothing at all. *The Accomplices,* for instance, makes much to-do over a pair of personages—

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the man with the goats, the insurance detective—whom eventually it just forgets about; and it handles its numerous impending confrontations by sacrificing them all to the protagonist's suicide. Apart from such rackety clockwork and the absence of people, the hallmark of these novels is a brazen and archaic moral vulgarity, like the libretto of a *verismo* opera; as at the very end of *The Blue Room,* just after the protagonist and his rejected mistress have been sentenced to life imprisonment for murder:

> . . . Andrée stood up and slowly turned toward Tony.
>
> This time, he could not turn his head away, but fixed his eyes on her face, mesmerized. Never before, even in their most intimate embraces, had he seen her so beautiful, so radiant. Never before had he seen her voluptuous mouth curve in such a smile of love triumphant. Never before had she so completely taken possession of him as she did now with a single look.
>
> And then her voice rang out:
>
> "You see, Tony, we'll never be parted now!"

Simenon has been misinformed: there are no coeducational penitentiaries in France. His fans are even sillier, however. Anthony Boucher, whose reflexes have been pickled by a lifetime of reviewing such stuff, reproaches "the hitherto confused" who took their time before acknowledging the master's greatness. He will have to establish a new classification of "the shamelessly unpersuaded."

The Erasers, though it has just been published here in translation, was Robbe-Grillet's first novel (it dates back a dozen years). It is both characteristic and disappointing. The fascination with the substantiality of inanimate objects, the preoccupation with time as a sort of slow orbit round immutable events, the fine and unimpaired sobriety of diction, the reduction of motive to random or automatic or antlike movement as in this god's-eye view of a railroad station—

> Among the curtailed movements—each of which affects only an extremely small section of the hall—between a timetable and a ticket window, from an information booth to a newsstand—or even within less defined areas, animated here and there with vague, hesitant, discontinuous, aleatory movements—in the middle of this swarming mass occasionally interrupted, up to now, by some less episodic trajectory, distinct currents now appear; in one corner a single file has started across the entire hall in a decisive diagonal; farther on, scattered impulses unite in a series of calls and quick steps whose impetus clears a wide passage until it comes to a halt against one of the exits . . .

— the signature of his later novels is already bold and identifiable. But the framework here is a conventional thriller (even if at times he seems to be trying to write a parody of one), and he allows it to muffle

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and falsify his perceptions. The difference is categorical. In *Jealousy,* for instance, the details are shocks and pressures on a susceptible imagination, they are ultimately the imagination itself. In *The Erasers,* the details are clues merely, whatever cycles, resemblances, repetitions, destinies the author imposes on them; they assemble at last—with pretentious delays and mystifications—into nothing more than the inanity of a solved puzzle. They are the means of comprehending the all too comprehensible.

Jealousy and Medicine makes a still tardier American appearance: it is a Polish novel first published in 1932. Michal Choromanski shares (anticipates) Robbe-Grillet's interest in illusions of simultaneity and recurrence, the normality of hallucination. But the novel is ornamental and inert; its operative details tend, once again, to be clues toward the solution of a routine mystery (does she or doesn't she?); there is an absurdly uninterrupted and symbolic violent windstorm to accompany the presumptively violent passions of the characters. Then abruptly, very close to the end, the author finds his subject and presents it without fuss: a coldly promiscuous woman, as remote and stylized as a Byzantine icon, a force of duplicity so instinctive and unshakable as to compel a man to take it for seamless innocence:

> "Rebecca!" mumbled Widmar, beside himself with joy. "You've never betrayed me, and you never will . . . will you?"
>
> "Never," she answered, and then added impatiently, "Why don't you believe me?"
>
> Then, utterly broken, but at the same time infinitely happy, Widmar, humble and ashamed, said, "Please forgive me."
>
> "There's no need," she replied simply.

Marco Denevi is Argentine, and *Rosa at Ten O'Clock* depends for its atmosphere on the musty austerities of middle-class Latin-American Catholicism. It too is a mystery with a solution; but very old-fashioned, like that aspect of Dickens in which a variety of characters greet one another with cryptic nods and incredulous stares under an oddly familiar portrait of a beautiful but wasted-looking young woman, and turn out after eight hundred pages to be father, mother, son, illegitimate daughter, and faithful servant. Since *Rosa* has fewer than two hundred pages, since its characters are not wholly subordinate to the mystery, and since its complications are more convincingly motivated and more intelligently unraveled than, say, Simenon's, it might be helpful to a detective-story addict who is willing to take the first step toward kicking his habit and learning to read fiction.

One of the virtues of fiction is to be informative—not about the methods of the police or of space travel, but about the modifications that an exposure to such methods is likely to effect in consciousness, motivation, behavior: Simenon hasn't written *Crime and Punishment* because he is responsive only to methods—criminal, criminological,

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sexual—not to life as a range of possibilities. Fiction seeks new possibilities, it is always on the lookout for new subjects. Those who argue that the breakdown of censorship has merely reduced sex and obscenity to the dimensions of any other subject—murder, for example—are quite right. Another way of putting the case is that the range of available subjects has been extended by this much. Since sex and obscenity have always done their part in modifying consciousness, they have always been proper subjects; and recently they have become legal and available as well. Moreover, since life imitates art (art is easier and more accessible than the lives one might wish to imitate if one knew them), the quality of American life has certainly been modified by its exposure to explicit sex and obscenity in fiction. The young, especially, think of themselves as the vanguard of the sexual revolution, and energetically act out the rôle that fiction detects and dictates. A decade ago Holden Caulfield dictated his style to adolescents; nowadays it is more likely to be Candy; and the feedback continues.

I Know What I'm Doing is an unillusioned account of the sexual adventures of a twenty-year-old girl, who, starting from nowhere with a young body and a candid mind, parlays them into her problem of choosing between a kind, dull lover in Los Angeles and a jealous, bright lover in New York. In the interval she tries on a series of men as she might try on a series of dresses. She is always curious, often bored or repelled, sometimes excited, never quite aroused out of the stainless-steel self-awareness with which she disinfects even her pleasures:

> She was thinking of her man of that evening, "the client," as an isolated person, a complete object. She contemplated him and admired him for being a man in the most narrow biological sense of the word, for not having a hollow, or being neutral—she imagined a neutral being with a smooth belly, like a doll—but for sticking out. It is excess matter, she thought, not necessary for surviving, a luxury, like all good things.
>
> She pursued those thoughts and the man became a thing almost, a statue. She brought herself back into the image, but in an active way. . . . She thought of how she had moved him with her hands as if his body, all of him, was simply a handle to move his sex with. . . .
>
> Perhaps all this is just my way of saying that I love the man, she then suddenly told herself. Love. If he were castrated tomorrow, I'd never want to see him again. Can love be narrow, focused on one place? Geographic love, she thought. She shook her head, rubbing the back of it against her pillow. She said half-aloud, "I'm twenty, a third of my life is over."

She has no use for politics or causes (knows them for frauds and evasions), won't keep up with the news as her New York lover compulsively does, believes in private life but has none really and indeed has only a moderate attachment to life at all:

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I turned toward him: he looked pale and old, with rings under his eyes. Unexpectedly, I felt sorry for him, I almost pitied him; I didn't know why and I had never had that feeling toward him before. I wanted to say, Don't be sad, it's all right, life isn't that important; and take him in my arms and rock and soothe him.

And here are daughter and mother at bay in the American heartland:

It was an easy weekend, they were pleasant toward me and toward each other. We didn't talk much but read papers and magazines and watched television. One morning my mother and I went into town to shop, and she bought me a pair of very good suede gloves. . . . And then the time was up, I thanked my stepfather for his hospitality, and she drove me back to the airport. We were late because we had waited for her husband who originally had said he wanted to do the driving, and she kept muttering about the other cars on the road. "They're all such Sunday drivers," she said fiercely, which made me laugh, she's such a bad driver. "You look very thin," I told her as I said goodbye, "why do you eat so little?" She looked at me and blushed, very embarrassed, and answered, "They think I have cancer."

"Oh Mother," I began, but she shook her head as if to stop me from saying more. "I'll be all right," she said.

It is a modest and rather frightening novel on what it feels like to be dead.

All the Beautiful People, on the other hand, is as full of bounce as a cheap tennis ball. It too has a young, sexually experimental heroine; but she is a very yeasty fashion model, moving with many a smart quip through the neon-and-naugahyde fastnesses of New York café society. The humor is exemplified by such inventions as the towns of Tamponade, Onantown, Glans Falls; and by this level of dialogue:

"The El Mo-roc-co! I haven't been there in at least two days."

"That's what happens when you live in a small town. All right, first we can go to the Platha for a little warmup and then we'll be able to take Elmo's a little easier."

"And then, if you're real good, you can come to my place for a nightcap."

"I'm sorry my dear young lady, but I never wear them."

"Then you'll just have to go, you'll pardon the expression, bareheaded."

Not content with such pleasures, the heroine drains them to the dregs and at length spurns them: she is sensitive, and draws the line at participating in an orgy with a fat ugly old man. The *coup de grâce* is her rejection by the sharklike lover whom she has alienated by talking about love; and she rejoins the reformed lush with whom she shares deep thoughts: " 'Where are we all headed, Katie?' " In fact one of the

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characters comes across with a surprising bang: the author ought to have ditched all the rhinestones and evangelism to concentrate on his male shark, who likes chicks in bed, doesn't lie to them, won't pant or sweat for them or put up with their tantrums, not even his wife's—

> ". . . Beth says you're probably a latent homosexual and you have to compensate for it by sleeping with every girl you see."
>
> "Oh mother. What your crazy sister won't dream up next. I suppose if I made it with every man I saw, she'd say I was a latent heterosexual and just compensating for it."
>
> "Stop calling Beth crazy. She's an intellectual, which you wouldn't know anything about. She knows all about psychology and says if you slept with a man just once and got it out of your system none of this would be necessary."
>
> See what happens when you give them the vote and teach them how to read? "I don't know why every chick is so interested in fags. You're sure every man secretly wants to be one. It's weird. But all right. And it's pretty broad-minded of you, mother. I'll make you a proposition. You find me a nice pretty boy, some little dimpled darling, how about your hairdresser, and I'll do the bit. I'll screw him for you, even let you watch. . . ."

Drive, He Said is also about youth. It was awarded a $10,000 prize by Mary McCarthy, Leslie Fiedler, and Walter van Tilburg Clark. It is about rebellious college youth, in their madcap but profoundly serious whirl through life with professors' wives and basketball (the hero, *post coitum triste*, recalls "the clean true feel of a basketball") and revolutions and munitions manufacturers:

> Moses' eyebrows went up in a pantomime of innocence. "But haven't you heard? I'm already on your side! Just last month I was appointed to the President's Special Committee on Arms Reduction!"
>
> Robert Frank clenched his square jaw and Hector saw his underlip tighten to a white line. . . .

It spotlights the hero as he transfixes the Dean of Students with flashing repartee:

> "We should relax and have fun, until we're old enough to know the True Tragedy of Life. Then we can become Deans."
>
> Solomon was offended. "Well, that's life," he replied grimly.
>
> "No," said Hector. "That's death."

It amuses itself with the cold war: "Our leaders had taken a firm line. 'We must not fight from fear, but neither must we fear from fight.' " It is about good Negroes and marijuana parties and good orgasms and love and death, all strictly according to the prescriptions of those bibles of the freshman bull session, *Dr. Strangelove* and *Catch-22*. And, though it sneers at all that flag-waving crap, it's *truly* patriotic, as

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when the hero, standing on Brooklyn Bridge, ruminates about "the vastness of America, which lay in the prairies and mountains and rivers beyond the Mississippi."

After amateur night, it is a relief to turn to so professional a purveyor of *Grand Guignol* as James Purdy, who takes the new freedom for his very Muse. The comic idea of *Cabot Wright Begins* is almost good enough not to require a book: the rapist as American hero. And much of its working out is very funny. The protagonist develops his talent after sessions with a quack whose treatment is to hang him on a hook for relaxation. His wife begins by putting her foot down (" 'We're living in the most civilized city in the world . . . and we're not going to do this every hour on the half-hour, and that's final. . . .' ") and later goes berserk in a supermarket. Meanwhile, having made his first score at the public library, he is off on his career of providing instant sex for the single and married women and girls of America:

> "We, she and I, vanished into one of the de Chirico alleys. I pulled her gently but with absolute never-let-you-go grasp into a hidden puddle beneath a watch-repair shop, dug hurriedly as you would hunting in warm wet soil for a diamond or opal dropped from a purse, found the 'place,' old familiar *belle chose* with my vivid hand, the veins dancing now under the only excitement that matters outside of war—grope, push away any dressmaking obstacles, there I have it in my hands, and just a question of a moment to unpop, and the mother of course screaming as though she did not at first blush know what was going on or what had to be done. First things first. There at last, girl too surprised to do a thing, and me pumping into her what life feels is never too good for anybody, right up to her lungs, you would think from her moans. 'This is my only pleasure, lady,' I called back to the mother, 'so why be a kill-joy?' Yes, my only pleasure. The only thing that ever made anything seem worth while. Call it a crime, that's a good old girl, for the mother was calling a policeman on the emergency telephone: 'Come quickly, officer! A dagger of meat has pierced my precious jewel. He is entering her basket of joy. She isn't screaming, officer, so I'll bet she's bleeding. Oh, my dear little Patty. Can't you get here in a helicopter, officer? Oh, God, it's too late already! Officer, officer, he's had his way with her! He's buttoning and calling it a night. Stop, degenerate, moron, stop! God, Patty, speak to your little mother. She lies there like a broken kewpie doll. Pray speak to me, darling. Are you going to open your eyes again, do you think? Are you wounded, my angel? You'll never be the same, it's a fact, my dearest, but you're going to get well, and we'll go to Vancouver together and never come back, that's right, dear, we'll go away together, only do get well for mother.' . . ."

Purdy's preliminary machinery, though, is astonishingly obtrusive and inefficient; and, once under way, whenever he isn't chronicling the

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hero's career he is in such a foaming rage at so many barn-sized American targets that he fires wildly in more directions than he has ammunition for. He loathes agents (America, says one, is ready for a novel about rape), reviewers ("Doyley Pepscout" wants novelists to "bring back *bloat* into the novel"), publishers, radio, TV, the ad-men, American politics, recent Presidents, American women, American men; he howls with anguish at the spectacle of a foundering continent; and his novel, after rocking between black hilarity and spastic fury, ends in exhausted despair: " 'I won't be a writer in a place and time like the present.' "

Back in the mother country, writers seem to have heard a few faint rumblings of the transatlantic sexual dyspepsia, and V. S. Pritchett has decided to have a go at it, though easy does it at first. *The Key to My Heart* even challenges the class barriers: the young tradesman gets to go to bed with the lady of the manor, it's all rather shiny and modern and casual, like the telly but important and sad underneath. There are also several "characters," those staples of tight-little-isle humor: the car maniac who whizzes through town; the lord who sells things to Americans; dear, sweet, cranky, crotchety Mum, who scolds and cossets her sturdy baker-boy—everybody one large blister of delightful British eccentricity.

The only British novelist who has understood and brilliantly exploited the new candor is Doris Lessing. On the strength of a single collection of short stories, *A Man and Two Women,* published a year ago, Mrs. Lessing is the best living British writer of fiction. Several years back she brought out a book called a novel, *The Golden Notebook,* which is pasted together out of autobiographical scraps by a novelist who is suffering from writer's block, and disarmingly says so in her text to anticipate the captious reader. *The Golden Notebook* was frenetically acclaimed by political critics—Irving Howe, for one—because it has a good deal to say about postwar radical politics, as well as the problems of emancipated women. But, even so far as it doesn't collapse into its fragments, it is narcissistically undiscriminating to the verge of psychosis, an extraordinary, exasperating, clinical book about (and by?) an extremely gifted and intelligent woman who tends to confuse her own labyrinthine sexual paranoias with twentieth-century politics and the fate of the world.

Children of Violence is planned as an omnibus autobiographical novel in five parts: the present volume contains only the first two, *Martha Quest* and *A Proper Marriage,* which were first published thirteen and eleven years ago respectively, and which are now for some reason—possibly Mrs. Lessing's growing reputation—reissued in a single volume. The heroine of *Children of Violence* is recognizable as an earlier version of the heroine of *The Golden Notebook*—a mutinous, ill-tempered, unresourceful young Englishwoman from the provinces who moves through her world, with the author's scarcely

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qualified approval, in a trance of annihilating egocentrism. The world of *Children of Violence* is, besides, the most tedious set of flaming youth since Scott and Zelda took their dip in the Plaza fountain at dawn: the offspring of civil servants in British colonial Africa just before World War II, a herd of faceless girls (the heroine is not interested in other women) and drunken lumpish futile men (the heroine finds men stupid, childish, sexually incompetent, and disgusting) who spend night after night at parties that read like potter's-field funerals. Toward the end, Mrs. Lessing's remarkable powers begin to get the better of her, as she describes with sardonic exactitude the breakup of the proper marriage that till then the heroine has somnambulistically accepted:

> He came back carrying Caroline, who was half awake, blinking in a sleepy smile.
>
> Douglas aggressively presented her the child, holding her out on his two forearms. Like a tray, she thought involuntarily. He said, in the sentimental voice, "Look, Matty, look at this."
>
> She snapped out, in extreme embarrassment, "Oh, don't be revolting, Douglas."
>
> The disgust in her voice startled him out of his own picture of himself. He stood there holding out the child, who was asleep again, on his two extended forearms, blinking at her in comical bewilderment. Then he went red with shame, and rapidly retreated again back through the rooms.
>
> She saw the lights switch out methodically as he came back, and thought, He's not at all out of control. He might imagine that he is, but he wouldn't forget to switch the lights out if the skies were falling. It might put up the electricity bill by tuppence.
>
> He began to undress.
>
> Now what's going to happen next? she wondered, out of her sense of improbability—it was not possible that this was really happening.
>
> As he was getting into his own bed, he suddenly changed direction and flumped over onto hers. He ground her shoulders, so that she felt the balls of his thumbs deep under the collarbones, and said viciously, "I'll give you another baby—that'll put an end to this nonsense."
>
> "Oh no you don't," she remarked breathlessly. But it all seemed so much more vulgar than was probable that she looked at him with embarrassment. "You're hurting my shoulders," she pointed out reasonably. . . .

It comes much too late to save the book; and, since the heroine is about to move into the events of *The Golden Notebook,* it is hard to imagine where *Children of Violence* will go for Part Three and after.

Henry Miller likes *The Sun of Death* well enough to have written a maudlin preface to it ("Through this simple soul the author reveals to

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us the true nature of wisdom . . ."). Miller has always been a bore as a philosopher, even in those early books whose emphasis is the wonderful priapic comedy that the philosopher in his windy vapors seems to have no connection with. At any rate, *The Sun of Death* swarms with simple souls (in a Greek village) and the true nature of wisdom: "All men are under a death sentence, but they forget it"; "The worthy writer, innocent of the crimes of his epoch, is ordained to record and judge them"; "What a beautiful world it is!" The novel is bloodlessly histrionic, a tableau of large wooden gestures. At the very end the noble motherly aunt, having stopped a hail of bullets so that the hero may live, won't die without saying a few words: ". . . My death will give you light! May it be your eternal sun!"

The Door in the Wall returns us to Simenon and the question of expertise. There is no reason for reading these stories unless one is interested in the customs of American Indians and the methods of anthropological research, as Oliver LaFarge was, and as—in these stiff, slow, formally ironic, obvious stories—he describes them with sufficient technical minuteness to gratify the enthusiast, thrill the dilettante, and irritate (because if he wants a textbook he'll order one) the common reader. Now and then a shadow of the inwardness of Indian life crosses the screen of academic prose; but the screen is usually opaque, a genteel and unresponsive shroud.

And if one is interested in the aftermath of an epoch of genocidal politics, Alfred Andersch—sophisticated German conscience—conducts a melancholy survey of survivors and forebears: the prosperous West German businessman who is becoming nervous, and beginning to hear things; the prosperous businessman who is a tourist and connoisseur; the alcoholic teacher of philosophy who spent the war as a functionary in the Nazi archives, "a bookkeeper of inhumanity," lost his beloved, and in a fit of caprice and inattention lets his mother die in an accident before his eyes; the German soldier whose life is a capsule history of Europe from 1899 to 1914. The title story of *The Night of the Giraffe* treats—with a hollow rhetoric not unsuited to its subject—a more specifically political event: de Gaulle's return to power. The stories are ambitious, superficial, and occasionally grandiose; they seem to be attempting to fix responsibility—for what? For nothing less than history, one supposes. The author is trying to write allegory; perhaps in postwar Germany it is impossible to try to write anything else, and equally impossible to write it: his figures drop without a sound into the bottomless pit of the epoch they are intended to illustrate and explain.

For Isaac Bashevis Singer, allegory is nourishment, as natural as breathing—yolky words recollecting the coherences of a time and place that were obliterated by Herr Andersch's history. Only two of Singer's stories do not deal with the *shtetl* and the village Jews of his youth, as vanished as Carthage and the Albigensians: in one of them, the remnant of the gas ovens meet at a wedding in Brownsville, like squeaking ghosts in Hades; in the other, a Jew in Miami encounters

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witchcraft in the Kosher palmetto desert. The *shtetl* stories are not altogether lacking in Uncle-Remus simplisms, Yiddish kitsch, the complacency of the in-group. As the last demon says, at the beginning of his story,

> I, a demon, bear witness that there are no more demons left. Why demons, when man himself is a demon? Why persuade to evil someone who is already convinced? I am the last of the persuaders. I board in an attic in Tishevitz and draw my sustenance from a Yiddish story book, a leftover from the days before the great catastrophe. The stories in the book are pablum and duck milk, but the Hebrew letters have a weight of their own.

There is some pablum and duck milk in *Short Friday*—the title story for example, which is something of a valentine to Yiddish cosiness. But the Hebrew letters (Singer writes in Yiddish) are a comfort and a terror to the man who uses them to write in a dying language about a dead civilization: almost always, they carry lost and familiar voices; they refine the rather too facile Yiddish irony; sometimes they even carry the weight of history, as when the Devil tempts the devout and learned rabbi—

> ". . . You know the Jews have never honored their leaders: They grumbled about Moses; rebelled against Samuel; threw Jeremiah into a ditch; and murdered Zacharias. The Chosen People hate greatness. In a great man, they sense a rival to Jehovah, so they love only the petty and mediocre. Their thirty-six saints are all shoemakers and water-carriers. The Jewish laws are concerned mainly with a drop of milk falling into a pot of meat or with an egg laid on a holiday. They have deliberately corrupted Hebrew, degraded the ancient texts. Their Talmud makes King David into a provincial rabbi advising women about menstruation. The way they reason, the smaller the greater, the uglier the prettier. . . ."

The Devil has easier victims than the devout and learned. "Blood" is the story of a sensual woman who becomes an adulteress, a lover of blood and death, a blasphemer, an apostate, and is at last tracked down and killed in the form of a werewolf. "Under the Knife" tells of a man who dreams of killing his treacherous wife but who must be satisfied with two incidental murders.

Singer's anachronistic community—faithful and fallen both—moves among emblems and manifestations, a step from inexpiable evil and the supernatural. The villages that were swallowed up glow in his stories with the numinous radiance of devotion, of a believed religion that has gone to Abraham's bosom forever. But then all the villages everywhere are gone, except in Singer's obstinate imagination. There are no longer any communities, or religions, or emblems, or spirits. But there are persons; and so fiction—all that prose which drives out devils—is still with us and will have to do.

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ROGER SALE

The Career of Ralph Ellison

Invisible Man is one of the really distinguished modern American novels—that much becomes clearer all the time. First readings tend to be baffled, admiring, and at least a little unconvinced because the book is so fiercely American and literary in its need to be "original." But it gets better with each rereading. The heavy, painstaking prose becomes more resonant and flexible as it becomes more familiar; the pretentious structure matters less each time through; the more outré scenes, like those in the hospital and with the hero's would-be seducers, come to fit in more smoothly even if they never are very interesting; the obviously great scenes—the opening, the trip with the Benefactor to Jim Trueblood's shack, the headlong rush through Harlem at the end—take on classical status among our finest moments of grotesque comedy. The pasted-on allegory is still there, of course, and it is particularly unfortunate that the superbly dramatized descent into the coal hole should be asked to "mean" so much in ways that delight exegetes and others who do not really like to read novels. But this fault is one of excess and reflects not a leaden spirit but an earnestness and effortfulness that are integral to Ellison's sense of himself as a writer.

Invisible Man, though, was published twelve years ago and Ellison's second novel has long since taken on that unreal quality that haunted the unpublished *Ship of Fools.* Ellison spent two years in Rome, attended writer's conferences, submitted to interviews, wrote journalism, taught at various universities, and almost inevitably admirers have felt that the second novel, when it did appear, would reflect damagingly the anguish that accrues to a brilliant writer who takes so long to publish a book that nothing less than a masterpiece will justify the years of work and waiting.

Now, perhaps in lieu of the novel, Ellison has published a collection of essays.[1] Such books have a way of quietly announcing the temporary or permanent demise of a novelist's will to imagine, so when *Shadow and Act* was announced, it was hard not to fear the worst. But though it is certainly not a great book, it shows that the fears were groundless. Ellison is still with us—large, impressive, ironic, cumbersome in his own polished way—and he seems to have lost no more faith in himself than is natural in a proud and serious man who finds writing difficult. At the end of a recent exchange with Irving Howe, he says:

> I assure you that no Negroes are beating down my door, putting pressure on me to join the Negro Freedom Movement, for the simple reason that they realize I am enlisted for the duration. Such pressure is coming only from a few disinterested "military advisers,"

[1] SHADOW AND ACT, by *Ralph Ellison.* Random House. $5.95.

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> since Negroes want no more fairly articulate would-be Negro leaders cluttering up the airways. For, you see, my Negro friends recognize a certain division of labor among the members of the tribe. Their demands, like that of many whites, are that I publish more novels—and here I am remiss and vulnerable perhaps.[2]

All the qualities of Ellison's best writing are here, especially the cool elegance of tone that is so curiously achieved with the intent and rather lumbering lines the sentences take. All an admirer needs to know is that whatever change and growth have happened to the author of *Invisible Man,* the essential characteristics are still intact.

The motto of *Shadow and Act* is "I am a writer." This is repeated so often that occasionally it seems Ellison is trying to convince himself, but the impression is probably false. Ellison calls himself a writer because he was so obviously not born to the manner and because for him the decision to write was so self-consciously final. The reminiscences in *Shadow and Act* show that he always assumed he would be a composer. Music was his first language, then, and when he writes about it, he is uncharacteristically relaxed and smooth. The details about Charlie Christian, Jimmy Rushing, and his own efforts to play the trumpet pile up abundantly and with little sense of relevance. It comes as something of a surprise to discover how simply garrulous Ellison can be.

But these articles, written mostly for *Esquire* and the *Saturday Review,* are obviously not what Ellison means when he says he is a writer. Music is *easy* to write about, reminiscences just happen, like breathing, and to Ellison writing is something that should come hard. Richard Reti once said of the chess master Anton Rubinstein that because he did not learn the moves until he was nineteen, chess was always a second language to him. As a result Rubinstein would sometimes commit the most obvious blunders in the middle of his most beautifully conceived games. So too with Ellison. Writing was apparently a talent acquired after he had chosen it as a profession and so his prose carries with it a seriousness and sense of dedication that is bound to make it seem labored even when it is most impressive. This is not a matter of little things, though Ellison can still write "centered around" and get tangled in the awkward and perhaps ungrammatical "their demands, like that of many whites" in the passage above. It is more an attitude towards words so reverent that he is bound to make them seem foreign to him. In the introduction to *Shadow and Act* Ellison is describing his childhood: "Anything and everything was to be found in the chaos of Oklahoma; thus the concept of the Renaissance Man has lurked long within the shadow of my past, and I shared it with at least half a

[2] For evidence that all might not be quite so cheery "among members of the tribe," see an article by Hoyt W. Fuller in *Ebony,* November, 1964, called "The Negro Writer in the United States," a report of a writers' conference held last summer in Berkeley.

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dozen of my friends." At first glance "lurked long within the shadow of my past" may be the most striking thing about the sentence, and it strikes as a cliché. But of course what is really interesting is that "thus" which seeks to connect causally "chaos of Oklahoma" and "the concept of Renaissance Man." This connection cannot be made with simple reminiscence, and the "thus" is not fully justified until five pages later. First he speaks of the southwestern jazz men with whom he grew up: ". . . artists who had stumbled upon the freedom lying within the restrictions of their musical tradition as within the limitations of their social background, and who in their unconscious way have set an example for any Americans, Negro or white, who would find themselves in the arts." Then he goes back to his boyhood and finds there a Huck Finn quality that sees in its contempt of social restriction the possibility of freedom: "Like Huck we observed, we judged, we imitated and evaded as we could the dullness, corruption, and blindness of 'civilization'." So the boys

> fabricated . . . heroes and ideals catch-as-catch can, and with an outrageous and irreverent sense of freedon. Yes, and in complete disregard for ideas of respectability or the surreal incongruity of some of our projections. Gamblers and scholars, jazz musicians and scientists, Negro cowboys and soldiers from the Spanish-American and First World Wars, movie stars and stunt men, figures from the Italian Renaissance and literature, both classical and popular, were combined with the special virtues of some local bootlegger, the eloquence of some Negro preacher, the strength and grace of some local athlete, the ruthlessness of some businessman-physician, the elegance in dress and manners of some headwaiter or hotel doorman.

From here, with the jazz men as idols and masters, it is an easy leap to:

> Behind each artist there stands a traditional sense of style, a sense of the felt tension indicative of expressive completeness; a mode of humanizing reality and of evoking a feeling of being at home in the world. It is something which the artist shares with the group, and part of our boyish activity expressed a yearning to make any- and everything of quality *Negro American;* to appropriate it, to possess it, to re-create it in our own group and individual images.

To be everything there is, but always in your own way—Renaissance men indeed, and because of the chaos of Oklahoma too. These five pages are mature Ellison. There is hardly a sentence one would not like to rephrase or rewrite, but the whole finally achieves a sense of style expressed simply in the thoroughness and self-consciousness with which an idea is thought all the way through.

So the specialness of "writer" for Ellison is like that of "poet" for Frost or "critic" for Leavis, and nowhere is this more in evidence than in Ellison's Leavisian response to Howe's "Black Boys and Native

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Sons." The debate (Howe's essay, Ellison's answer, Howe's rejoinder, and Ellison's last word) was somewhat pointless in the way Leavis' have always been. Howe's article is perhaps not one of his best, but it is a characteristically intelligent account of the Richard Wright-James Baldwin controversy and its implications for Baldwin as a writer. Its point is that Wright freed Baldwin (and Ellison) so they could be writers of more than simple protest, and it viewed with ironic pleasure Baldwin's eventual assumption of a role very much like Wright's. Of course Howe has an affinity for the committed writer and so he wonders along the way how any Negro writer, given the conditions of his life, "could so much as think or breathe, without some impulsion to protest." Also along the way Howe has a fine sentence about *Invisible Man:* "It would be a shame to neglect the fascinating surface for the mere depths."

Now, knowing anything at all about Ellison, one can see how he would be offended by this argument, but in the course of answering he twists Howe's essay rather badly. What he was really attacking was not an argument at all, though, but any trace of certain assumptions he knows how to detect better than anyone. The assumptions are: all Negro writers should be grouped together; Ellison's experience is describable or prescribable because he is a Negro or because Richard Wright wrote before him; Ellison has sold out because he has not, as Baldwin has, spoken out to whites about The Negro; any effort a Negro makes to be himself is immoral in so far as it ignores the pain of other Negroes so ravaged they barely have selves to be. Now perhaps Howe does bear traces of some of these assumptions, but they are really traces and he bears them honorably. Thus Ellison is both right and wrong. He is right because he will tolerate no definition of "Negro experience" that does not include his own experience, and he is excellent at showing how Wright falsified his life in so far as he imagined worlds for the Negro that could not possibly have had in them anyone as various as Wright himself. Ellison is also right to speak out against politically committed liberals because they have so often betrayed an unconscious ignorance that makes them seem as distasteful as many to whom they are superior. But he is wrong because he makes Irving Howe into a scapegoat. In *Shadow and Act* he prints only his side of the exchange and anyone who reads only this book will not know how misleading Ellison is being about his adversary.

But more than anything else the debate shows that, whatever joys and rewards they have given him, these past twelve years cannot have been easy for Ellison. Coming to writing late has not done for him what it did for Conrad and George Eliot: set free in a prolific rush the long accumulation of knowledge and experience. Certainly the brightness of the spotlight played on *Invisible Man* contributed to his reticence, as, very probably, has our silly mythology about second novels. But *Shadow and Act* shows that Ellison's "failure" to write more novels

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is consonant with everything he is. It may well be that he will not produce that large body of work which we, not so sillily, demand of our greatest novelists. It could even be there will be no second novel. But so be it. If nothing else, *Shadow and Act* shows a writer constantly working to be a writer and a man sufficiently visible to show there is nothing ignoble in that struggle.

In the context provided by this book, *The Fire Next Time* seems very much like another *Advertisements for Myself*. Because both Baldwin's book and Ellison's speak of being a Negro, it is difficult not to compare them, and, for me at least, the comparison is generally in Ellison's favor:

> [Being a Negro American] involves a rugged initiation into the mysteries and rites of color which makes it possible for Negro Americans to suffer the injustice which race and color are used to excuse without losing sight of either the humanity of those who inflict that injustice or the motives, rational or irrational, out of which they act. It imposes the uneasy burden and occasional joy of a complex double vision, a fluid, ambivalent response to men and events which represents, at its finest, a profoundly civilized adjustment to the cost of being human in this modern world.

This has its vaguenesses and none of Baldwin's great flash, but it is better than comparable passages in *The Fire Next Time* because free of the self-aggrandizement so marked in Baldwin's need to insist that suffering is something that happens only to Negroes. But a comparison of the two has wider and perhaps more interesting ramifications. Over and over in this country a writer has come to grief as he has grown desperate to fulfill the promise of his best early work. Baldwin is a particularly pathetic example at present, but he may be conspicuous now because we have already silently agreed to give up on so many others. It would be paranoid and sociological indeed to blame "ourselves" for their failure. To do that would require that we know more of ourselves than we do and less of other periods when talent seemed not so consistently to go rotten before being ripe. Of course we make careers for writers before they are really careers, but after all, not to do so would mean deliberately withholding praise from a good first or second novel in the name of some foolish and pompous maturity.

But the context is nonetheless there, and it is disturbing. Because of it we might be tempted to praise Ralph Ellison for work he has not done simply because he has thereby avoided the common lot. But *Shadow and Act* saves us from that folly just as *Invisible Men* has saved us from the afterthought that we always praise first novels too highly. The collection is only that, not a cause for cheering so much as for relief that we can, and, strangely, with pride, continue to hope unsentimentally that its author is to be a great novelist.

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HOWARD GREEN

A Woman Killed with Kindness[1]

CLARA SVENDSEN COMES TO PRAISE DINESEN but almost manages to bury her. We may sympathize with the admiration and affection which inspired this memorial volume, but not, I am afraid, with its ineptness.

And what a subject she had! A Danish girl of good family who went to Africa to farm coffee; who distilled a superb and subtle autobiography from the heartbreak of her failure there; who composed in a foreign tongue tales astonishing in their eccentric brilliance (brilliant above all in the delicately arrogant irony which made *us* seem the eccentrics and *she* the keeper of tradition); who, finally, living out her own legend as witch and *femme du monde,* was apotheosized—while the Swedish Academy was away on business reading the novels of John Steinbeck—before an international congregation of admirers. Surely a figure as remarkable as any in her own tales, yet this is a memorial which forces us to hunt for something memorable.

Perhaps part of the trouble lies in the very notion of memorializing. One only does it for extraordinary people, and it is precisely their extraordinary qualities which most easily slip through the nets of piety. And, of course, much of Dinesen's particular cachet lay in her elusiveness. When she discussed her use of pseudonyms with Daniel Gillès, one of the contributors to this volume, she eulogized discretion. "My dream," she told him, "would have been to remain anonymous all my life, like the Arabian story-tellers. Then I could have said all I wanted to and only what I wanted to."

At any rate, Clara Svendsen, who was her secretary and helper for the last twenty years of her life, has unwittingly contributed to this dream by giving us a very uninformative book. There are some fifty tributes, but many of their authors seem to have known Dinesen too briefly to have anything much to say about her. For example, William Jay Smith, who is here apparently on the strength of his having introduced her at the Y.M.H.A. Poetry Center when she visited New York in 1959, tells us that he liked her stories, that she was a good teller of stories, and that she is "eternal." All this we know . . . and so apparently do the other contributors, to judge from their tendency to repeat the same sentiments in a variety of forms. This is not their fault. It is Miss Svendsen's, because she has seemingly exercised no editorial responsibility whatsoever in the making of this book. She tells us nothing of *how* it was compiled: it reads as if she had solicited

[1] ISAK DINESEN: A MEMORIAL, edited by *Clara Svendsen.* Random House. $5.00. THE GAYETY OF VISION: A STUDY OF ISAK DINESEN'S ART, by *Robert Langbaum.* Random House. $5.95.

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the contributions and then, without further ado, printed everything that came in. How can one blame the contributors for their exiguity? —their feeling for Dinesen may have been deep and genuine, but that does not necessarily entail having anything worth saying in print. Yet how, being asked, could they have refused without seeming churlish? She tells us nothing of *why* they were asked to contribute—the nature of their relations with Dinesen sometimes comes out in the course of their tributes, but more often it does not and we are simply left to guess. And she does not even tell us *who* they are. Some we all know (John Gielgud, for example, and Marianne Moore); others some of us may know (Donald Windham and Margaret Anderson); but others scarcely any of us will know (like Thyra Jakstein and W. E. Süskind, whose tributes, to add to the confusion, are printed in German). The English-speaking reader, to whom the book is presumably addressed, will not be encouraged to know that the most interesting contribution is among those given in French, Daniel Gillès' account of conversations in which Dinesen discussed her literary tastes. And I wonder how many of her admirers, even, who read the charming little letter from one Kamande Gatura will know that this is the legendary Kamante from *Out of Africa*.

There are some interesting fragments here and there—suggestions of the vulnerability that underlay the urbane mask; glimpses of her courage during the prolonged and finally fatal illness; and scenes of her entertaining friends at home in Denmark, an unaffected and countrified figure very unlike the rather acerb and alarming sorceress of the public appearances—but on the whole there is not much to be gleaned from these tributes. And the thinness of their substance is not redeemed by any virtues of rhetoric, too much of which oscillates in a dreary range from Dust Jacket (Louise Bogan: "She enriched the literature of her time with her power of imagination and her gift of fortitude") to Travelogue (Solita Solano: "And so farewell, glory of Denmark, *requiescat in pace* under your great beech tree in your sweet sanctuary, by the sea of your indomitable ancestors, etc., etc.").

To go from Clara Svendsen's book to Robert Langbaum's is to go from famine to feast. The *Gayety of Vision* is the second book-length study of Dinesen to appear, but it is the first good one. The *World of Isak Dinesen* by Eric O. Johannesson, published three years ago, was a naive and perfunctory discussion of some of her themes and techniques which showed but a rudimentary sense of their relation to each other and no sense at all of the imagination that shaped them. Mr. Langbaum has a feeling for both; his reading of her work is perceptive and sympathetic; his thoroughness earns our respect; and his learning, which he deploys intelligently and unpretentiously, engages our interest.

The substance of Dinesen's writing makes her appear as aloof from the concerns of our time as she is indifferent to our notions of order

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or common sense, and her manner, which is unfashionable to the point of being archaic, encourages that impression. It is deceptive, Mr. Langbaum argues, and he endeavors to show us not only that her work is beautifully coherent in itself, but also that in its concerns, notably with the relativity of truth and the nature of identity, it is fundamentally modern, existentialist even. Isak Dinesen? Another wretch being dragged from the ranks of literature and tortured into existentialism by a modish critic? Not really. To read her carefully is to see that he is right, for her heroes and heroines move in an existentialist world: their destinies and identities are defined (as she defines her own in *Out of Africa*) not in terms of their psychological or social functions, but by the actions they choose to perform in a world they recognize, or come to recognize, as fundamentally cruel and absurd.

By a careful analysis of her tales, he shows how intimately these considerations figure in their apparently wayward pattern. The analysis is often illuminating, but it sometimes suffers from his critical method, the earnestly explicative approach now so much in vogue. It presents two hazards. The first is that of becoming tiresome. Only a tolerant reader will get to the end of this book without having his patience taxed by the relentless explanatory paraphrasing. The second is that of becoming inflationary:

> The theme of spiritual impregnation [in "The Cardinal's First Tale"], of in other words the Holy Ghost, recurs throughout Isak Dinesen. The finely comic detail of the *castrato* lover merges here with mythological lore about heroes begotten by gods upon mortal women to suggest—if we take into account what we know of the Oedipus complex, whereby the son rejects his biological father to seek his real or spiritual father—the point where psychology and anthropology turn into mythology. But all this is accomplished without any loss of lightness and without the remotest reference to psychology and anthropology. Isak Dinesen seems to contain and avoid our knowledge, to have access to it through some older source.

To quote a single passage out of context is not fair to the quality of Mr. Langbaum's argument, nor indeed to his style, which is on the whole mercifully free from such fashionable jargon. I simply want to suggest how his eagerness to establish her merit occasionally tempts him to load her work with a metaphysical cargo heavier than its diaphanous fabric will comfortably bear.

His own reason for all this paraphrase and commentary is that it will win new admirers for her and allay the suspicion "even among her [present] admirers, that her stories are brilliant mystification and nothing else." He hopes to demonstrate "the high quality of her stories by explaining them." But there is surely something perverse in this: to "explain" Dinesen too much is to miss the point of what one hopes

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to explain. Her stories are indeed more than brilliant mystification, but there is brilliant mystification in them, and it is there on purpose. She wanted to shock her readers out of their comfortable bourgeois assumption that the world becomes ultimately reasonable if only one brings reason enough to bear on it. To her this was wishful thinking, sentimentality. The universe made sense only if one posited a capricious and ruthlessly humorous God, and she created her own work in the image of this universe. She played God to her readers by subjecting them deliberately to all manner of bewilderment. "I have laid a wager with Satan about the soul of my reader," she could have said with one of her heroes, the writer Charlie Despard, "I have marred his path and turned terrors upon him, caused him to ride on the wind and dissolved his substance, and when he waited for light there was darkness." By substituting his light for her darkness, Mr. Langbaum is not necessarily doing Isak Dinesen a kindness. In thus playing God, she had, to be sure, a serious intention, which he documents very perceptively . . . but she *was* playing, and the humor of her game was what gave her seriousness its point.

I think Mr. Langbaum must have had this in mind when he called his book *The Gayety of Vision,* but he is so intent on expounding the vision that he sometimes forgets how much the gaiety was a part of it.

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

First Books and Others: The Quarter's Poetry

THE QUARTER'S NEW POETRY[1] DOES NOT STIR ME TO ENTHUSIASM. Too much reading perhaps, more than thirty books in a few weeks: it would be enough to mortify anyone's sensibility. Yet I know from past experience that I become somewhat easily enthusiastic—my friends say too easily—and I know also that among these new books several which seem to me the most interesting turned up, as it happened, at the bottom of the stack. When my eyes were bleary and my head was nodding, I could still respond to the fresh image or the animated rhythm when I found it. Consequently I am inclined to think that my lack of enthusiasm is a true reflection of the quarter's work. Should we be surprised? Since poetry is what it is, should we hope to be deeply moved by a new book of poems more than once every three or four years? I know people who say that once in a lifetime is enough. In any event I cannot disguise my feelings; although I found a few books that pleased me and a considerable number that are competent and inoffensive, I found none to which I can give unqualified commendation. A rather high proportion of the books sent to me are "first books," which accounts in part for the general dullness. Most beginners must learn, and part of learning is publishing a first book; I don't see why we should be disturbed or scornful if the poems of the learning phase are imitative and awkward. I shall turn to them after I have dealt with a few of the books by established poets that seem most worthy of comment.

The best, I think by virtually anyone's standards, are Jean Garrigue's *Country Without Maps* and David Ignatow's *Figures of the Human*. Both poets have won through long since to ease and flexibility of style and to the intellectual and emotional independence which permits an

[1] COUNTRY WITHOUT MAPS, by *Jean Garrigue*. Macmillan. $3.95. FIGURES OF THE HUMAN, by *David Ignatow*. Wesleyan University Press. $1.85. NEW AND SELECTED POEMS, by *Thomas McGrath*. Alan Swallow. $4.00. BROKEN DEATH, by *Elliott Coleman*. Linden Press. $3.00. DAWN VISIONS, by *Daniel Moore*. City Lights. $2.00. PREAMBLES AND OTHER POEMS, by *Alvin Feinman*. Oxford University Press. $3.75. THE WORLD, THE WORLDLESS, by *William Bronk*. New Directions/San Francisco Review. $3.00. A CIRCLE OF STONE, by *Miller Williams*. Louisiana State University Press. $3.50. THE WINDOW, by *Vern Rutsala*. Wesleyan University Press. $1.85. FIGURE FOR SCAMANDER, by *Carol Johnson*. Alan Swallow. $2.00. HEROES, ADVISE US, by *Adrien Stoutenburg*. Scribner's. $3.50. ARMS OF LIGHT, by *Claire McAllister*. Knopf. $4.00. SUN CITY, by *Bruce Cutler*. University of Nebraska Press. $3.00. FOUR INFINITIVES, by *Thomas Whitbread*. Harper & Row. $3.50. RHYMES OF A PFC, by *Lincoln Kirstein*. New Directions/John Weatherhill. $3.50. PROGRESSIONS AND OTHER POEMS, by *Albert Cook*. University of Arizona Press. $5.50. MIDNIGHT IN THE CENTURY, by *Maurice English*. Prairie School Press. $4.00.

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original response to experience. Let no one slight these attainments; they are rare. Beyond that, however, the two poets are extremely different, and cannot be compared. In the past Miss Garrigue has often irritated me with her mannerisms of fashionable femineity. She seemed to belong to the world of Colette (to whom the first poem in her new book is addressed), a world suffering, no less in the blatancies of *Vogue* than in Colette's chief novels, from a profound emotional stoppage, basically sexual. The manner is recognizable anywhere: a too involved Jamesian syntax that is inclined to burst predictably into pseudo-ecstasies, exclamations which are not really exclamations at all but simply coynesses. At one time in publishing offices it was customary to refer to exclamation points as bangs, meaning explosions, but for me the association with a particular hair style is inescapable. Yet after all I am not sure that Miss Garrigue's connection with this world amounts to more than her manner, and even this disappears in her best work. Leaving aside the poems about Colette, cats, country gardens, etc., her work contains a core of intensely and I should say fully humane poems, which are increasing in proportion to the whole. If they never rise to anything that can be called a pitch, they nevertheless perserve the attractive quietness of steady intellectual warmth. At the same time there can be no doubt that she has a splendid lyrical gift and uses rhyme and meter elegantly. This is a less rare attainment than her others; some of her poems could be transposed to volumes she never wrote and no one would know the difference; but in the best poems her softly modulated rhymes and assonances together with unexpected variations in the length and pace of her lines produce what she (elegantly) calls "a little native elegance": the effect is right and original. The most ambitious poem in her book, called "Pays Perdu," is a meditative travelogue eleven pages long, a considerable effort by modern standards. In the best sense it is a Wordsworthian poem, an emotional intertexture of landscape and idea that we can read with pleasure while we recognize its philosophical limits. Indeed the poem suggests that this form of "thinking" is as indispensable as any in an age when all mental activity has become an expression of the pathos of self-limitation.

The longest new poem in David Ignatow's book is twenty-five lines; the average is about ten. This is the chief "fault" I find in them, although one can scarcely call it a fault in the usual sense since it is what Ignatow has consciously chosen and he performs splendidly within these limits. I know no one who has written about the problems of the very short poem, and I should think it would make an interesting subject. In reading Ignatow's tiny poems I often have the impression that they are static, that they lack the dynamic inner relationships which we believe necessary to art; yet when I examine them closely to see what part is missing—beginning, middle, or end—I find I cannot make up my mind. Perhaps they are complete in embryo; or, as Ignatow would no doubt prefer to say, in essence. Perhaps the problem lies less in es-

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thetics than in psychology: a poem that ends just when the reader is beginning to get interested obviously will produce a certain abruptness of effect, and I don't think that going back over the poem again, even a dozen times, will make up for this foreshortening. There are other limits in Ignatow's work as well, limits of theme and attitude. He is an urban poet who writes almost exclusively of the cruelty, filth, and insanity of city life; his poems are bitter and shocking; even his love poems occur in this context and, in a sense, are vitiated by it; you might say that a large part of their meaning lies precisely in this vitiation. Within his limits Ignatow writes beautifully. In spite of all the pessimistic urban poetry we have had in recent decades, I think none hits so consistently at the most vulnerable part of our sensibility. This is not because it is shocking—after all, shock wears off quickly—but because Ignatow's feeling is perfectly genuine and perfectly his own. I have no question about his ability, but only about his future: how long can a creative instinct survive on these miniature emblems of disgust? In any case *Figures of the Human* contains not only new poems from the past two or three years but a selection of poems reprinted from Ignatow's first two books, *Poems* (1948) and *The Gentle Weight Lifter* (1955), and so it is a good introduction to all his work.

Another poet who has failed to find a mode of creative survival is Thomas McGrath, and this is a pity. The process has gone a good deal further with him than with Ignatow. McGrath was the one authentic poetic voice of revolutionary America in our time, I believe. Unlike Archibald MacLeish and John Wheelwright and the New York poets associated with *Partisan Review,* McGrath came out of the prairies and was well acquainted with the mining towns of the Rockies. In other words he came from the region which for several generations supported the only consistent radical impulse in the country; he was born to radicalism, he didn't learn it in college. He was the celebrator of Bill Haywood, for instance, whose name is probably unknown to most young Americans today. McGrath brought to his revolutionary poems an extraordinary verbal talent, great fluency and figurative versatility; his ancestry gave him, perhaps, the Irish gift of gab. He is the only poet I know who could stick such terms as "surplus value" and "general strike fund" into his poems and make them work *poetically* twenty-five years later. A few of his war poems are equally good. Then, however, in the late forties and fifties McGrath's work became more and more acceptable, ticking off rhymes academically, and today he appears to lack all style and subject. It is easy enough to relate this to the decline of the Left, and no one would think of blaming McGrath for what has happened. It is simply a pity. Nor do I mean that all his early work remains cogent or original; he committed many of the same gaucheries that you can find in abundance throughout the files of *Masses & Mainstream.* But a dozen of his poems written before 1945 are the best we have of modern American radical verse, and I hope

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very much that the *New and Selected Poems* will bring them to the attention of younger readers.

In *Broken Death,* a slim volume of new work, Elliott Coleman continues the experiments that have occupied him for several years. I have not seen any explanation or rationale for these experiments, and consequently I may be missing their intent. Obviously Coleman likes word-play; not only alliteration, association, and punning, but any kind of typographical or grammatical manipulation that will break up and rearrange the language, with the object, I presume, of breaking up and rearranging our perceptions. Some of the poems are simply word lists, laid out alliteratively or associatively. I confess I see no reason for publishing such exercises. In other poems the experimental verve is permitted to consolidate around a more formal object, and then the effect is more distinct and sometimes quite telling. But for me it remains no more than an effect, even in the best poems. Writing-for-an-effect appears to be the motif of any decadent literature. If Coleman's experimentalism stems roughtly from Joyce—there is a poem about Joyce in his book—the impulse nevertheless resembles something anterior to Joyce, something Joyce despised: the preciosity of the nineties. Which is not to say that Coleman's technical acuity may not flourish in the workshop or be of utility to other writers.

The word-play in Daniel Moore's *Dawn Visions* is ten times wilder than anything in Coleman's poetry, but it springs so clearly from non-technical motivations that there can be no mistaking the author's intent. The poems are united in passionate affirmation; they are visionary, ecstatic, hallucinated explorations of interior experience. The precise occasions of the poems are seldom stated. Sexual episodes are apparent, a journey of sorts is apparent, and there seem to be references to drugs. They are a celebration of a radically independent religious sensibility. How they will strike the individual reader is a matter of temperament. They are certainly not anti-literary, for one cannot imagine poems more implicitly or necessarily rising in their own language, but they do fall outside most conventional categories. I found myself reading in mounting excitement which nevertheless fell off from time to time into boredom or incomprehension; the ecstatic vision is too persistent, and I wondered if the poems might not appear to better advantage if set in a prose context, a diary or even a philosophical discourse. The *Vita Nuova,* another radical work, comes to mind. I do not know if *Dawn Visions* is a first book. The publisher tells us nothing about the author, perhaps at the author's own behest. But Moore is an accomplished poet in his own manner, excessive though it may be, and his book, which probably requires more time than a reviewer can give it, is undoubtedly out of the ordinary. It is illustrated by the author's drawings, rather Blakean in mood.

Alvin Feinman's book, *Preambles and Other Poems,* is not only a first book but presents work almost wholly new to us; only two of his

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poems have appeared in a magazine. Yet the book comes with such an accompaniment of raves and fanfares by eminent men of letters that we are led to expect an extraordinary literary event. I am not sure that we get it. The poems are difficult; some are so difficult that they are laughable. The writing is compressed and elliptical and full of philosophical diction. Feinman is called, on the jacket, a new Hart Crane and a new Wallace Stevens. He was at one time an instructor in philosophy at Yale, and his poems are an apparent attempt to give affective form to real metaphysical torment. They seem to be written in a philosophical doubt so profound that every joined structure of thought, habit, or sensibility is suspect, resulting in a kind of anguish, a tortured desire to unjoin. The poet cannot suffer any reality except the chaos of total equivalence, the natural world symbolized in images of impartial light, yet he finds himself irremediably attracted by the sweet power and falsity of intellectual desire. The clearest of the good poems in his book is "November Sunday Morning," and since there is bound to be a good deal of discussion about Feinman's work, I'll quote it entirely:

And the light, a wakened heyday of air
Tuned low and clear and wide,
A radiance now that would emblaze
And veil the most golden horn
Or any entering of a sudden clearing
To a standing, astonished, revealed . . .

That the actual streets I loitered in
Lay lit like fields, or narrow channels
About to open to a burning river;
All brick and window vivid and calm
As though composed in a rigid water
No random traffic would dispel . . .

As now through the park, and across
The chill nailed colors of the roofs,
And on near trees stripped bare,
Corrected in the scant remaining leaf
To their severe essential elegance,
Light is the all-exacting good,

That dry, forever virile stream
That wipes each thing to what it is,
The whole, collage and stone, cleansed
To its proper pastoral . . .
I sit
And smoke, and linger out desire.

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(One wonders if Feinman's ellipses are typographical only or if he actually cut up a longer poem to make this one.) The piece contains obvious reference to Stevens' "Sunday Morning," but aside from that it is primarily a mood poem, and says less than it pretends. The language, too, is more conventional than at first appears, beginning with the opening "And" and including such unconvincing words as "emblaze," "random," and "collage." Locutions like "any entering" or "scant remaining leaf" or "severe essential elegance" are to my taste forced, extravagant, and close to trite. If I read the poem correctly, the poet ends by committing himself, in ironic joy, to a tired contemplation of the world's meaningless glory, along with dozens and dozens of other poets in this "existentialist" epoch, though infected with more simple Shelleyan romanticism than most of them would find admissible. One cannot doubt the authenticity of the poet's experience, it may even be a starting place for something that will be valid and useful for all of us later on, but I hope that before he comes to his second book Feinman will have discovered a less artificial rhetoric.

I had read William Bronk's *The World, the Worldless* in manuscript, and part of the report I wrote at the time is printed on the dust jacket. I did not know this was to happen; if I had I would have tried to write something more pointed. In the circumstances I suppose it is not proper for me to "review" the book. I shall simply say that Bronk, like Feinman, is a philosophical poet, working from a position very similar to Feinman's. His verse lacks Feinman's tension and rhetorical flourish; it is low-keyed, even rather casual; its virtues, I think, are its lucidity, its descriptive exactness, and the way it suddenly catches the pathos of the philosophical mind.

Of the remaining first books that I shall mention at all I suppose Miller Williams' *A Circle of Stone* is the most accomplished. It contains not a single bad poem; I rather wish it did. It is southern, reactionary, ironic, religious, unpunctuated, worldly wise, metaphysical, modestly moral, and it sighs on a falling cadence—page after page after page. It is impossibly slick. It is Neo-Fugitive verse, written by an intelligent and sensitive latecomer who has read his predecessors well, but as far as I can see it adds nothing to their accomplishment in either form or substance, and hence does not and probably could not speak with their deeper fervor. Here is a poem called "Depot in a River Town":

> In the depot and the darkened day
> the clack of an old pinball machine
> demands a curious notice.
> More sleeping than not
> a satchel faced farmer makes noises.
> A sailor circles like a child in church.

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In the depot and the darkened day
I surrender my back to the imperative bench,
unlistening hear the emphatic pencil
tap itself on the table.

The little blonde reads
and fingers the cloth of her blouse
like a nun telling beads.

Cracked across after an ancient painting
the face of the woman with children
ignores and ignores.
There is fog at the windows
and the open doors.

Within the ear's rim rises a separate sound.
Wood slapping side slipping water sounds
settle me deep.
I feel again the penny in my pocket
and the slow sleep of the river
wraps me round.

I shouldn't think many readers would need Howard Nemerov's introduction to tell them that this is parable, that the depot is a special depot, the river a special river, and the fellow with a penny in his pocket a special traveler. (Having well-known poets write introductions for first books is apparently another aspect of current fashion; Richard Eberhart has also contributed an introduction to one of our other first books.) What Nemerov does not tell us, however, and what I think no one can tell us is why this poem should *be* a parable. The details are fine, the sailor circling like a child, the pinball machine clacking its numbers, the onomatopoeia of the water lapping—these are slick and professional. But what urgency links them to this parabolic structure? What coherence forces us to believe in the importance of the fellow setting out on his journey? I find no necessity here, either of language or figure, least of all a necessity of meaning. The details are contrived and the poem is a contrivance; a pretty contrivance, if you like, but so is a nine dollar bill.

A large part of Vern Rutsala's poetry is as imitative as Williams', though Rutsala's manner is simpler and easier. Here is the opening of his "Nightfall":

Night settles like a damp cloth
over the houses. The houses that are shut,
that show no wear. Lawns
are patrolled by plywood flamingoes
or shrubbery clipped from magazines.

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We have been here before quite a few billions of times, it seems. And much of Rutsala's other verse is just as predictable. However, in the latter part of *The Window* several poems are fresher and livelier than the rest, and make better use of his quite distinct verbal talents, especially one called "A Day in March." I had thought I would avoid the word "promising" in connection with any of these poets, it seems such a slap in the face to anyone who has suffered the labor and anxiety of publishing a book at all, but in Rutsala's case the term is applicable, I think, in its well-meaning sense.

Carol Johnson's *Figure for Scamander* is a small book of poems in the style we associate with Palo Alto, strict and austere; but it is a formal strictness only, a strictness of appearance; the passionate inner metric of a Winters or a Cunningham is not in these poems. The chief poem in Adrien Stoutenburg's *Heroes, Advise Us* is a long narrative about the Scott expedition to the South Pole in 1912. Why a woman living in California should choose to write about five men dying in Antarctica is somewhat mystifying. The result is what you would expect; and I am sorry to say that whatever scrap of good repute had remained to the Lamont poetry prize has been dispelled by its conferral upon this book, rather than upon any of half a dozen other first books mentioned in this review. In terms of outward appearance Claire McAllister's *Arms of Light* is the most attractive book I have read this quarter. Knopf have surpassed their own high standard of design and production; and the author herself, to judge by the picture on the back cover, is an extremely good-looking young woman. But her poems are primarily school-girl work that should never have been printed at all, and her few more mature poems are religious harangues that leave us shaken not with ecstasy but with logomania. The original poems in Bruce Cutler's *Sun City* are unconvincing; but the book contains a translation of *El Cántaro Roto* by Octavio Paz that seems to me in some respects superior to Muriel Rukeyser's; at least it is simpler and more true to the rhythms of American English. The contrast between the two translations is interesting, and I think we must be grateful for any exposure we can get to the work of the magnificent Mexican poet. Thomas Whitbread's poems, in *Four Infinitives,* are mostly low-keyed autobiographical work in conventional forms; some have the appeal of nostalgia, at least for those who were acquainted, as I was, with Westchester county before 1939, but in others, impeccable as to rhyme, the jokes are forced.

Lincoln Kirstein's *Rhymes of a PFC* is a strange, in some ways wonderful book. All the poems are about the 1939 war, written in a high spirit of contempt for everything military, especially the general staff. The book, as any veteran will recognize, contains the speech, imagery, even the smell of war, like Bill Mauldin's cartoons. But how much is recollection? The poems are all ballads, clanging rhymes, rough-and-ready meters, wide-ranging diction, and at first I found them lively; but

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then the effect palled dreadfully before I was half through. I saw that I was experiencing the war in my memory, not in the poems. I concluded, regretfully, that Kirstein lacks the peculiar spontaneity of technique which can convert balladry from the most literal of poetic forms, as it must be to begin with, into a self-sustaining art. We see it in the old ballads or even in the best of Kipling. Yet I am reluctant to leave it at that; for in comparison with the other poets under review, Kirstein has the virtue of real topical liveliness, and my impression is that if I had read his ballads separately, in newspapers or on broadsheets, I might have been more taken with them than I was when I read them all at once.

Finally I have two books by poets who have been publishing their work in magazines for many years, but until now have held off collecting it in hard covers: Albert Cook (*Progressions and Other Poems*) and Maurice English (*Midnight in the Century*). Cook's poems seem products of the late romanticism that recurs periodically when the original impulse has turned intellectual and moralistic; at his best he reminds me of Vernon Watkins, but tonally somewhat drier and thematically a good deal more sedate. English is a more ebullient poet, interested in social and Freudian themes; his longest poem is about a murder in a whorehouse. One can find little fault with either poet on the score of structure or versification, but their diction sometimes lets them down, Cook tending toward wordiness and English toward flashiness. Both poets write for the reader—if any such remain—who prefers metrical composition to prose, regardless of the poem's intrinsically prosaic qualities. They are experienced, intelligent, modest writers who have worked without compromise. In some degree the cultural mechanism rests upon them and others like them, and we can pay them this tribute unreservedly.

Still one looks for an occasional delight. On one of the evenings while I was writing this review we had a lunar eclipse. It was cold in the mountains where I live, the temperature well below zero and still falling; the night was brilliantly clear. From time to time I stepped outside for a moment to look at the eclipse through my binoculars: the intensity, the coppery dimness, then the intensity again. I suppose a thousand morals and allegories could be drawn from this, but I will not be the one to draw them. I will simply say that in preparing this review I have read 1500 poems—an appalling number, I agree, but the calculation is unmistakable—and of them all I found not more than six that could merely reconstitute the immediacy and trenchancy of experience with the vividness of my stepping out on the snow to look at the eclipsing moon. I exclude such additional desiderata as dramatic interest, cultural or moral significance, thematic consistency, linguistic fidelity, breadth of vision, originality, etc. Is this a reasonable proportion, 6 to 1500? I leave it to you.

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GERALD WEALES

What A Life!

ERIC BENTLEY HAS BEEN CALLED EVERYTHING from a phenomenon to a factory. To my generation of drama critic and teacher he is a fact of life and a formative one at that. His *The Playwright As Thinker* came at the end of the war, a shock and a pleasure, to announce that modern drama is a serious business and an intellectual concern. He wrote in a vigorous prose that was sometimes witty, sometimes strident. His was a tone of voice that could not be ignored. *Playwright* is still a remarkable book in many ways, although—as is customary with landmarks—it is now less often used than simply pointed out in passing. His division of modern drama into two traditions is still eminently workable and his discussion of individual playwrights informative, but it is now obvious that, in his concern with ideas, he talked a great deal more about drama than he did about plays. More disturbing (to him, I should imagine, as much as to the reader) is the last, the agitprop, the let's-bury-Broadway chapter which ends "from the fastnesses of our Little Theaters let us shout: THE THEATER IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE DRAMA!" I don't want to imply that he has a greater fondness for the Broadway theater today than he had in 1946, but he has now come around to taking his drama wherever he can find it, even to trying to invade Broadway himself. After the publication of *Playwright* and his book on Shaw, he began a process of education which was carried on in public. He went, as the title of one collection of his essays says, in search of theater. It is during this period that Bentley began to show more faces than Dr. Lao. Bentley as reviewer, performing (often amusingly) in the pages of *Harper's* and the *New Republic*. Bentley as observant traveler, sending back news of the international theatrical world through the pages of *Theatre Arts*. Bentley as director, doing Lorca in Dublin and O'Neill in Zurich (to do Lorca in Spain and O'Neill in the United States would have been a taller order). Bentley as anthologist, putting together his collections of modern and then of classical drama. Bentley as academician, taking the chair that Joseph Wood Krutch had just got up from at Columbia. Bentley as translator, turning his hand to Pirandello, to Chekhov, to Schnitzler, to Verga. Bentley as entertainer, as in his latest Folkways record in which he sings (after a fashion) "Songs of Hanns Eisler." Most insistently, Bentley as Brecht.

As with most men who have protean ambitions but who are not Proteus, Bentley is better at some things than others. I suspect that, in the long run, his work as an anthologist may have contributed most to the change in theatrical tastes in this country in the last fifteen years.

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There is no space here for a detailed criticism of his various activities in and around the theater; in any case, it is the activities themselves and not his proficiency at them that made me list them in the paragraph above. All of them would seem to be pushing Bentley away from where he stood when he wrote *The Playwright As Thinker,* to be insisting on the specific rather than the general, to be forcing him to the object, the play itself. Since my own non-public journey has been in that direction, I received with anticipation the news that, after seventeen years on the road, Bentley was at last publishing a real book (not just a collection of magazine pieces) and that it was a kind of primer.[1]

I cannot say when I have been more provoked by a book than I was by *The Life of the Drama.* In both senses—I found it provoking *and* provocative, but more often the former. I can best indicate the ambivalence I feel toward the book by citing the conflicting reactions I had to it. Reading it was a chore. I found myself struggling through page after page, reading from a sense of duty only, and then coming suddenly on a section which caught my attention, absorbed me, made me think (for a moment) that this was the book I had hoped it would be. Similarly, I found myself convinced that the book would never be useful to me—that what it had to say was either too familiar or too quirky—and then I would hear myself in the classroom using a casual remark of Bentley's to explain a scene in *The Children's Hour* (a play, incidentally, that *The Life of the Drama* would scarcely acknowledge). There are a number of reasons for my disappointment in the book as a whole and for the uneasy doubt I have about that disappointment. For a book that is dealing with drama at its most basic, it lingers too long on abstract statements, turns too seldom to look at specific plays up close; when it does so, however, as in two pages on *Measure for Measure,* it can be very perceptive. For a book that is trying to define the elements of the drama and the genres, it circles endlessly, edging its way toward definitions, losing itself in contradictions. Each chapter is put together from a number of labeled sections, but the blocks do not build comfortably into a total structure; there are edges sticking out in all directions. I was reminded of the introduction that Bentley wrote for *Seven Plays by Bertolt Brecht,* in which he scattered provocative sentences like feed in a chicken yard, but it is a chaotic meal that has to be made up of grains picked at random. Near the end of the book, when the still annoying cloudiness has parted enough to indicate that there are definitions to be found, Bentley comes on apologetically: "I hope the foregoing generalizations are clear, but, if they are, they must also be too simple, too definite, and too schematic to correspond to all the facts." Such a statement (with which I am in sympathy) makes me wonder if what I take for imprecision is policy. For a book that is trying to free drama from the clichés that surround it, to clear away the philosophical debris that has piled up on it over the years,

[1] THE LIFE OF THE DRAMA, by *Eric Bentley*. Atheneum. $5.95.

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this one is heavily burdened with Bentley's psychology which is really a kind of existential metaphysic and is as narrow and stultifying as any idea is when it gets a stranglehold on the analysis of an art. For a book by Bentley, it is stylistically dull. He appears to have grown gentler over the years, which is to the good I suppose, but I had not realized until now how much his early style was formed by a kind of intelligent malice. Now that it is gone his sentences seem flat and humorless. Although each of these complaints has the hint of a compliment in it, in the end I came away from *The Life of the Drama* more sad than wise. A closer look at what the book is trying to do and how it does it may indicate why.

The Life of the Drama is really two different books, both of which have relevance to the title. Without denying that plays have meaning, Bentley indicates that he is more interested in the "life" of the drama, in those qualities which make a play exist, which draw and hold an audience, than he is in its paraphrasable meaning. That "life" can be discerned both in the elements that go to make up the drama and in the nature of the experience an audience has in response to the various kinds of drama; for that reason, the book is divided into two sections—one on the "aspects" of a play, the other on the various genres. The two never quite coalesce.

Bentley's first section is, in part, a response to a conventional way of talking about the theater, an insistence that a play is art and not life (or that its life is art). At about the time I was reading Bentley, I came across Brooks Atkinson's review of *The Rose Tattoo,* which he called a "segment of human life torn out of the universe and put on stage intact—observed and recorded by an artist and not forced into any pattern." Atkinson was writing against a newspaper deadline, of course, and probably meant no more than that he liked the play; but academic critics with time on their hands have fallen into the same trap. This is the kind of criticism Bentley is fighting in his insistence on the importance of plot, the usefulness of stock characters, the unreality of stage language, the informing idea that is both experience and meaning. It is not a lonely fight he is making since an increasingly large number of teachers and critics, in talking about plays, are concerned with what is happening to whom and how. In so far as his opening section makes some new converts and gives them the tools to work with, it is the most important part of the book. There are difficulties here, however. When he moves away from simple definitions (plot, dialogue), the slipperiness begins to creep in. In the chapter on character, for instance, he wants to make an important differentiation —that between the simple type and the individual character. In an attempt to avoid the usual conventional language that might say simply that Hamlet is more like a real person than Osric is, he defines the complicated character in terms of energy (but the stock characters have this, too), of existence on stage, of "human encounter," of a final

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mystery. The effect is confusing rather than enlightening. After struggling for a while with Bentley on character, I put down the book and picked up a copy of *The Tamarack Review* which had been lying around my apartment. In it, I found Jean Le Moyne speaking of

> that inexhaustible quality of surprise that comes from the individual autonomy of a true character. I mean by that, that a fictional character . . . must be sufficiently indeterminate to be a vital force in his own drama, or more simply, in the development of his own life. His reality depends on his being one of the principal sources of his own story.

That, I decided, is what Bentley means (or ought to mean) by character.

The shortcomings of the first section—the problems of definition—come on stronger in the second. Here Bentley sets out to define the genres in terms of the psychology of the author and his audience. Farce and melodrama, it turns out, are childish (but honorable) genres in which the author (and the audience) acts out fantasies of aggression and escape. Comedy and tragedy are adult genres in which the author (and the audience) faces up to life (best described in the words of Camus' Caligula: "Men die; and they are not happy") and is rewarded with a kind of transcendence. "Like tragedy, comedy can achieve a transcendence over misery, an aesthetic transcendence (of art over life), and a transcending emotion (awe in tragedy, joy in comedy)." Tragi-comedy, also an adult genre, is either tragedy with a happy ending (forgiveness winning out over revenge and/or justice: suddenly in this chapter revenge becomes central to life and drama) or comedy with a tragic ending (most of modern drama since Büchner) where the transcendence is . . . well, two or three things. On p. 339, the tragedy is "transcended only by truth" and on p. 347, by hope: "The purpose is survival: the easing of the burden of existence to the point that it may be borne." You can take your choice, or put the two together (to get the hope from the truth maybe, unless—as I would like to think—the truth is in the hope), or you can go to p. 342 and discover that the aggressions in tragi-comedy "can neither be transcended nor brought to heel." Such contradictions abound. In the chapter on tragedy we learn that transcendence in Lear is "implied in the power to write the play" although later, in the chapter on comedy, the tragic transcendence comes from identification with the hero; it is in comedy, now, that we identify with the author. These contradictions come largely because Bentley is moving from one example to another and the individual plays and writers cannot be placed comfortably within a single definition. In Part Two, he becomes an example of the kind of critic—by generalizations made mad—which Part One is designed to refute.

I have become so suspicious of generalizations in recent years that

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when someone says, "Good morning," I am tempted to answer, "Be specific." Even so, it is impossible for me to read a book like Bentley's without wanting to quarrel with his underlying assumptions—even if the quarrel forces me to generalize. The philosophy (he calls if psychology) which underlies all of Bentley's generic discussion assumes that man is only aggressive, that his only motive is revenge, that one has to be consoled for living, that the fact of death poisons life, that "Reality gives pain." It is true that this is the prevailing literary view of the twentieth century (who was that waste land I saw you with last night?) and that if anyone is tempted to doubt that it is the whole truth, there is a chorus of commentators who chant, "Belson, Buchenwald, Hiroshima and TV dinners," to remind him that he is living over an abyss. Twentieth-century pessimism seems to me as naive, as great a half-truth as any other *life-is* generalization, and its advocates do not play fair. Bentley, for instance, to prove his point about revenge as motive invents an archetypal New York bus driver, whose tone of voice "bespeaks a life solemnly dedicated to the proposition that one must get one's own back"; I have ridden his bus (a streetcar named despair), but I have also ridden behind bus drivers who were so courteous, kindly and patient that they re-affirmed the Pelagian view of man. Bentley says that the joke behind the joke in the phrase "Drop dead!" is that the speaker means it. A few years ago there was a nauseous popular song about affirmation and faith which began, "Every time I hear a newborn baby cry. . . ." The joke behind the sophisticated, the mocking reaction to it (and I love to sing it with gestures) is that the joke is on the mocker, that the affirmation is real. Certainly most art (particularly most drama) deals with the uglier truths about men and the universe they live in, but in part the reason is practical; as Tolstoy said at the beginning of *Anna Karenina,* "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." All the chat about transcendence in Bentley's book seems to me an elaborate way of saying that art, which brings order out of disorder, is one of the pleasures of life, which is an elaborate way of refusing to say that the ugly truth is only half the truth about human existence. "Now when the affirmations are suspect, negations may be more honorable," Bentley says at one point. They also may be more cowardly and more conforming. Bentley's book bristles with fascinating ideas, but in its clarity (its underlying assumptions about truth) and in its lack of clarity (the definitional contradictions) it seems to me more likely to bring shadow than light to the contemplation of drama.

At one point, Bentley differentiates between what is *presented* and what *implied* in a play and adds, "Dramatic criticism emphasizes the implications at its peril." That sentence might well be a judgment on his attempt to define the genres, but it will serve as well for Robert Brustein's new book.[2] *The Theatre of Revolt* is much more conven-

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tional than *The Life of the Drama,* an easier book to get into, an easier book to walk away from. What Brustein has set out to do is to show that modern drama is intellectually and spiritually of a piece, that the differences among playwrights (Bentley's two-way split in *The Playwright As Thinker,* for instance, although Brustein never mentions that book) are more apparent than real. In a society, a world, a universe no better than it should be, Brustein suggests, the modern dramatist must be in revolt. The rebellion takes three forms (and a playwright may embody any or all of them)—the messianic (in which the playwright wants to replace God); the social (in which he rebels against society); the existential (in which he rebels against the human condition). Since the rebellion takes dramatic form, the playwright is forced to be double, at once to embrace and to attack revolt, to identify with and to repudiate the rebel characters. To make his case, Brustein offers essays on the eight playwrights whom he considers major figures: Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Shaw, Brecht, Pirandello, O'Neill, Genet. The intention presumably is to give us both dramatic criticism and a history of ideas; inevitably, one suffers at the expense of the other. Since the method is biographical, it is more often dramatic criticism that goes under. In a sense, the book is at its best in the chapters on Ibsen, Strindberg and Brecht, in which, presenting the standard view of the authors, Brustein can illustrate how the idea of revolt operates in their lives and works. For anyone primarily interested in the works, however, the book is at its worst in those chapters. It is almost as though Brustein were returning to the old historical, names-and-dates approach to literature—here played on a philosophical and psychological plane—for his discussion of the plays almost disappears in his discussion of the men. Although he surely does not mean to say so, the chapter on Strindberg gives the impression that the plays have no existence at all without the playwright's biography. Brustein's most useful chapters (from my standpoint) are those on Chekhov and Pirandello in which his general theory runs up against the dramatists' objectivity and he finds himself dealing extensively with the plays themselves; the best single analysis is of *The Iceman Cometh,* where for almost ten pages O'Neill is elbowed aside by exegesis. *The Theatre of Revolt* is more about revolt than it is about theater and that seems to me too bad, for Brustein has a sharp eye when it is not beclouded by theory.

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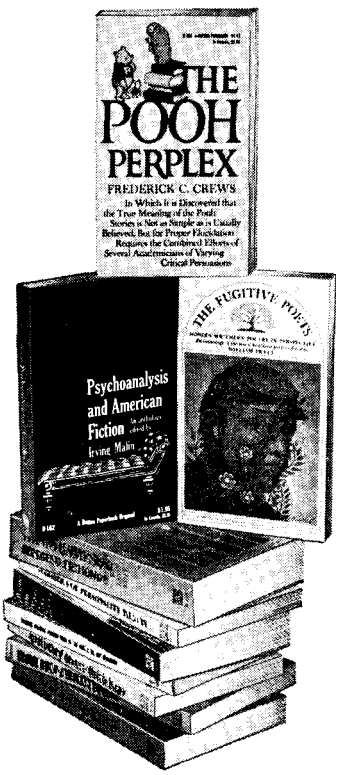

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GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

Behold the Man, If You Can

HERE ARE TWO BOOKS ABOUT GREAT AND FAMOUS ARTISTS.[1] Reading them churns up a good many speculations and generalizations about The Artist—his relations with society and with women, the effect of success on him, his egotism, and so on. But I shall hold myself down to one line of concern, the literary problem of how to present a great artist in a memoir.

Chaplin's *My Autobiography* is exasperating: such a waste of good material. The story is simple and spectacular. From a childhood of abject poverty, he rose to become the most famous man in the world, loved, rich, sought after, persecuted only by villains; and this rise came about partly by luck, partly by his own astuteness and diligence, but also partly by reason of a gift which he no more understands or takes credit for than Cinderella does for the touch of the magic wand. No one holds it against a superb clown that he is a poor writer. Chaplin writes in verbal clichés, he has little talent for building a scene narratively, he presents episodes in stereotyped patterns. "Thus the silken threads of a brief and luxurious episode snapped, and we fell again into our accustomed impecunious ways." Still, as long as he has written his memoir, you go to it hoping at least that your imagination will be provided with enough details so that it can construct a character halfway worthy of the tale. Any man who could create movies of such universal appeal and power as *City Lights* and some of those others must surely be worth knowing. What is Chaplin's relation to the Tramp of his own creation, and to the Charlie, or Charlot, of popular creation? There is a question worth answering. However, as things stand, you will learn less about this set of connections from Chaplin's autobiography than you can from *The Clown,* a recent novel by Heinrich Böll. Although the narrator of this novel is unlike Chaplin in nearly all the circumstances of his life as well as in the contours of his character, nevertheless he is a well-known satiric mime presented in such a way as to make comprehensible—among other things—the relationship of man to clown to public figure. In Chaplin's case, it is the clown that matters most, but instead of telling us much of anything about the clown, he mostly displays himself as, or cashing in on, the public figure.

In the opening chapters he provides a certain amount of the detail

[1] MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY, by *Charles Chaplin.* Simon and Schuster. $6.95. LIFE WITH PICASSO, by *Françoise Gilot* and *Carlton Lake.* McGraw-Hill. $6.95. Since Françoise Gilot is necessarily the source of information and is manifestly an intelligent woman who knows at least some English, and also since the book is written in the first person, I assume that Carlton Lake, an art journalist, has functioned essentially as an instrument of her will. In this review, by author I mean Gilot.

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needed to fill out the romance—the years before the clown and public figure are created. But the scene in which he recounts his inventing the Tramp, out of blind occasion, is the last in the book which is even partially satisfactory. Thereafter, the bulk of the book consists of name-dropping. Not that the other varieties of snobbery and gloating are slighted. In 1952 Chaplin was in Paris for the opening of *Limelight.*

> Before leaving Paris for Rome, Louis Aragon, poet and editor of *Les Lettres Françaises,* had telephoned to say that Jean Paul Sartre and Picasso would like to meet me, so I invited them to dinner.

After dinner Picasso invited Chaplin alone up to his studio. They had no common language.

> We came upon the most deplorable, barnlike garret, which even Chatterton would have been loath to die in. Hanging from a nail in one rafter was a stark electric bulb, which enabled us to see a rickety old iron bed and a broken-down stove. Resting against the wall was a pile of old dusty canvases. Picasso picked one up—a Cézanne, and a most beautiful one. He picked up another and another. We must have looked at fifty masterpieces. I was tempted to offer him a round sum for the lot—just to get rid of the litter. In that Gorki's 'lower depth' was a gold mine.

Self-expression like this provides useful material for a biographer, since Chaplin's projection of himself in *My Autobiography* must be considered in any understanding of him. But for an uninformed reader of the book, the trouble is that Chaplin's account of himself so distorts his personality as to make it impossible to conceive him adequately. From some inadvertencies he dropped along the way, I would guess that he is probably far more interesting and somewhat less obnoxious —less starkly obnoxious—than he projects himself as being. May a good biographer come along to look at him proportionately and whole, and so repair the damage this book does its author. Especially may we learn more about how he worked on his movies. His vanity has hereby been established definitively, once and for all. Now let us have as many glimpses of him at work as possible, for without them he is not all there, indeed is mostly not there.

Such glimpses of a great artist in action give *Life With Picasso* its modest value. Here is the version which Picasso gave his mistress of the episode with Chaplin in the studio. The two at least make it clear that this is the one time they met.

> "The interpreters were doing their best but the thing was dragging badly," Pablo told me. "Then I had the idea of getting Chaplin alone and seeing if maybe all by ourselves we couldn't establish some kind of communication. I took him upstairs to my painting studio and showed him the pictures I had been working on recently. When I finished, I gave him a bow and a flourish to let him know it was his

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> turn. He understood at once. He went into the bathroom and gave me the most wonderful pantomime of a man washing and shaving, with every one of those little involuntary reflexes like blowing the soapsuds out of his nose and digging them out of his ears. When he had finished that routine, he picked up two toothbrushes and performed that marvelous dance with the rolls, from the New Year's Eve dinner sequence in *The Gold Rush*. It was just like the old days."

The book's pretensions are a good deal less modest than its accomplishments. It purports to be a memoir shaping the beginning, development, and ending of the author's ten-year love affair-marriage with Picasso. In so far as it deals with this relationship, it is of symptomatic value chiefly, more useful to Picasso's biographer than to a lay reader, for the author has two disastrous limitations as a narrative creator. She employs an inadequate psychology. Any psychology would be inadequate to the conceiving and creating of a character as marvelous as Picasso, and hers is in itself no worse than average. Indeed, the trouble is that, for a European intellectual of the age, it is about average and only average, and that she pretty well confines her understanding to its cramping doctrines. Also, she lacks the literary art—the rare and high art—of putting herself proportionally in the wrong, an art absolutely essential to a memoirist playing a central role in his story. Without it, he lacks definition as a character; worse, when things go wrong, he lays all the blame on others, to the ruin of credibility and good narration. Gilot devotes the last section of the book to analyzing the reasons for the rupture between herself and Picasso. He behaves badly, to be sure, but because she does not know how to put herself in the wrong and so join him in the fellowship of the imperfect, she puts her somewhat meager psychology to the service of what must be called self-justification: analysis as vengeance. The epitome of all this may be found in these two sentences.

> The heart of the problem, I soon came to understand, was that with Pablo there must always be a victor and a vanquished. I could not be satisfied with being the victor, nor, I think, could anyone who is emotionally mature.

Here is that sour little quince of modern psychology, *maturity*, puckering the mind. If there is one thing the evidence of this book points to, it is that there is some profound connection between the quality of Picasso's greatness and the fullness with which he feels, expresses, acts out his impulses, not excluding the childish ones. To imply that *this* man is immature, one must assume that maturity involves denying the child in oneself—from which rigid condition God save us all.

But a generous share of the book is less a shaped memoir than the author's reporting anecdotes and opinions, by means of which one can indeed begin to understand something of Picasso. Because he is far

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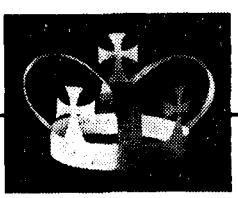
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more intellectual and apt with words than most painters, his opinions on art and artists are worth listening to.

> "And why did Plato say poets should be chased out of the republic? Precisely because every poet and every artist is an anti-social being. He's not that way because he wants to be; he can't be any other way. Of *course* the state has the right to chase him away—from *its* point of view—and if he is really an artist it is in his nature not to want to be admitted, because if he is admitted it can only mean he is doing something which is understood, approved, and therefore old hat—worthless. Anything new, anything worth doing, can't be recognized. People just don't have that much vision. So this business about defending and freeing culture is absurd. One *can* defend culture in a broad, general sense, if you mean by that the heritage of the past, but the right to free expression is something one seizes, not something one is given."

There speaks the great bohemian; let the recent crop of bohemian nihilists heed him. Gilot gives a good many glimpses of Picasso working and commenting on his methods of work. And she quotes some of his stupidities. "When I asked him what, exactly, had made him join the Party . . . he said, 'I came into the Party as one goes to the fountain.' " She has a good memory, so that, when she manages to retire into the background of an episode, she provides words in which he manifests himself from time to time. And what a man he is! On the whole one must be grateful to her, yet pray that her subject will find, as Joyce found, an Ellmann worthy of him.

From the two books, at least this much can be said to one who would go beyond gossip in his memoir of a famous artist. Neither avoid the mystery nor attempt too hard to explain. Put the artist in the foreground of every scene, and show him related proportionately to those elements in his life which reveal him truthfully, especially to his work. It is not Chaplin or Gilot who sets the example of how to talk about such matters, but Picasso (as reported by Gilot).

> "When I went for the first time, at Derain's urging, to the Trocadéro museum, the smell of dampness and rot there stuck in my throat. It depressed me so much I wanted to get out fast, but I stayed and studied. Men had made those masks and other objects for a sacred purpose, a magic purpose, as a kind of mediation between themselves and the unknown hostile forces that surrounded them, in order to overcome their fear and horror by giving it a form and an image. At that moment I realized that this was what painting was all about. Painting isn't an aesthetic operation; it's a form of magic designed as a mediator between this strange, hostile world and us, a way of seizing the power by giving form to our terror as well as our desire. When I came to that realization, I knew I had found my way."

Like that.

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